

Justified in the LORD
Isaiah 45.25

Mike Elliott • Dominion Covenant Church • September 13, 2009

9 “ Woe to him who strives with his Maker!
Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth!
Shall the clay say to him who forms it, ‘What are you
making?’
Or shall your handiwork say, ‘He has no hands’?

24 ‘ Surely in the LORD I have righteousness and strength.
To Him *men* shall come,
And all shall be ashamed who are incensed against Him.

25 In the LORD all the descendants of Israel

Introduction

Last week Mr Swab shared with us the phenomena of moving to a new town and having to learn the local stories behind the street names. Here in Omaha we rightly wonder, Who is the Douglas of Douglas County? and Who is the Dodge of Dodge Street?

So often in Christian circles we talk like the locals and use lingo that we take for granted. We toss out phrases like “I’m saved”, “have you heard the gospel”, or “justification by faith” and assume our audience, and we ourselves (!), understand what we mean by them.

Perhaps you have gotten past Dodge and Douglas so you are ready for Hartman and Davenport, Farnham and Blondo. Are we ready for the meat or are we still on the milk of the word?

Even if we are on the meat, it is good to be refreshed in the basics, because oftentimes we forget what we thought we knew. We may get so involved in learning the significance of the side streets that we forget what used to be the obvious meaning of the main boulevards.

The big picture of Gods revelation in the Bible, the main boulevard, is who he is and who man is in relation to him, right? We make a huge mistake if we confuse that; perhaps thinking that the Bible is only a history book, or only a moral code. Many people gain that perception by spending too much time looking at a narrow part of the Bible and not enough time in other parts. Within the richness of God’s revelation there is history and there is a moral

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code, but they are parts of a whole that tell us God is holy, we are sinners, God judges sin, we need to be reconciled to God, Jesus achieved that reconciliation and imputes his righteousness to the elect, and so forth. That is the full picture.

Just like the Bible itself, chapter 45 of Isaiah contains a rich variety—some history, some moral code, some redemption, etc. This all comes to a head in the final verse I want to focus on today; this final verse includes some words that may seem obvious on the surface but if we take them for granted, or fail to understand what they really mean, we will be greatly lacking—perhaps to our ultimate peril.

Before we get to those critical words let's first look at the context:

In the first four verses of this chapter, we read that God will use Cyrus to defeat other nations, for his people's sake. He'll "**subdue nations**" for "**Israel my elect**". Cyrus was the king of the Persians who defeated the Medes and ultimately the Babylonians, ruling over a huge empire throughout Asia.

In verses 5-10, God makes a chilling call to submit to him because he is the one and only almighty God. He formed the light and created darkness, he makes peace and creates calamity, he sends both righteousness and woe—woe to him who rebels against his maker!

In verses 11-19 we have the blessings that come to God's people as the nations around them are convicted and convinced that God is the Lord. Cyrus was instrumental in this when, one year after conquering Babylon, he ordered the return of the Jews to Jerusalem. Amazingly, providentially, they did not return empty-handed—he ordered that the Jews' neighbors **help [the Jews] with silver and gold, with goods and livestock** (Ezra 1.4)

Finally, in verses 20-25 we have the conversion of the Gentiles, who are called "escapees from the nations". There is a great multitude drawn together before God. These escapees have been following their impotent, powerless idols. They have no knowledge but God declares true knowledge to them: that he is a just God and a Savior, there is none besides him. (v21)

Then we come to the simple words of verse 25...

In the LORD all the descendents of Israel shall be justified, and shall glory.

I. “In the LORD...”

A. *One True God vs. other false gods.*

- **The only God: vv 3, 5, 6, 14, 18, 21, 22**

- **I ...: vv 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 12, 13**

As I said, this verse is the culmination of the chapter that precedes it. In the chapter God says no less than 8 times “I am the LORD there is no other” or “there is no God besides me”. And over 20 times he says “I... I... I...” “I will break in pieces...I have named you...I form the light...I will direct all his ways...I declare things that are right.” God, the LORD, leaves no room for doubt that He is the one and only God who is and who accomplishes these things.

Of course he does mention the other false gods, in order to show that they are futile and impotent. Verse 20 refers to the “**carved wood image**” and “**a god that cannot save**”.

Obviously those false gods do not save or justify anyone. They only lead their followers to shame and disgrace (v17, 24).

So, this is who the LORD is: the one and only God, the one who accomplishes all these things. And it is in, or by, him that the descendents of Israel will be justified.

B. *The deity of Christ vs. the sinfulness of man.*

This carries over to the New Testament teaching about Christ: it is *in* Christ that God restores relationship with his people and blesses them:

- **Romans 6:23**

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- **Romans 8.1**

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus...

- **2Corinthians 5.17**

Therefore if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

- **Ephesians 1.3**

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.

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Really, when we think about it, it could be no other way. If we are honest about the gravity/seriousness of our sin, and the gulf that exists between the holy God and a sinful person, then it is so trite to think that an object of wood or stone, or my own pitiful labors, or the works of a great man, could reconcile me with God. Because of the tragic seriousness of our sin and the awesome holiness of God, justification could only happen in the LORD/in Christ. Praise be to God for his wisdom, grace, and mercy.

II. “...the descendants of Israel...”

Who, then, are the recipients of this grace and mercy in Christ? As our text says, it is “**the descendants of Israel**”. There are two critical points to observe here: this is a community of people, not autonomous individuals, and there is continuity throughout history, not disunity.

A. Community vs. Autonomy.

It is easy to make our relationship with God solely an individual matter. Of course there is an individual level; each one of us will stand, individually, before the judgment throne one day and give account for our actions. But on another level there is a corporate / community dimension. We were all united under Adam as our covenant head, and thus died in sin—

▪ Romans 5.12

through one man [Adam] sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.

1Corinthians 15.22a: in Adam all die.

However, there is another communal relationship as that verse continues:

▪ 1Corinthians 15.22

in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

Christ is the covenant head of the redeemed, since he is the seed to whom the promise was made (Gal 3.16). In so far as we are in Christ, we ourselves are the seed, and we too are heirs according to the promise (Gal 3.29).

B. Continuity vs. Disunity.

▪ Galatians 3.16, 29

The recipients of the promise are called the descendents of Israel. It makes sense to read about Israel here, after all we are in the Old Testament, right. But remember that the New Testament has a lot to say about the descendents of Israel: namely that those who believe in Christ are they! We, you and me, are the seed of Israel and heirs according to the same promise.

To be intellectually honest I have to say that if you search the Bible you will not find a verse that says, “Christians are the descendents of Israel.” It takes a bit more work than that.

Recall Abraham was the father of two sons, one of which was the heir of the promise. That son, Isaac, had two sons and one of them (Jacob) was the heir of the same promise. The key fact there is that mere biological descent does not determine whether or not you are included in the promise. If that were the case then the other brothers would have been in on the promise also. When Scripture says the promises were made to Abraham and his seed it then clarifies that the seed is singular, ultimately it is Christ (Gal 3.16). That is pretty narrow. One person out of all humanity qualifies as Abraham’s seed. And he never married or had children! Ahh, but we come back to being *in Christ*. All those who are Christ’s are Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise. So, yes, the Bible does say that Christians are the descendents of Israel, grafted into that tree of faith.

When you do the work you will find the result is just that: those who are in Christ are the promise-receiving descendents of Israel. The faithful of Jacob’s day and the faithful of our day are united together. One God, one Christ, and one people of God united in Christ.

III. “...shall be justified...”

Thus far we have God, and it is by him that this work is done. We have the descendents of Israel, and it is in them via Christ that this work is done. Now we come to the work itself. Justification. The descendants of Israel shall be justified in the LORD. What does that mean?

Here is where we touch on one of those words that gets batted around Christian circles but, I submit, we may be a bit hazy on defining and understanding. I have framed this part of your outline around the statement in the Westminster Confession, which we read earlier. Those wise men expended much effort to distill the biblical truth down to a few rich words, which we will now explore in some detail.

In justification God pardons sins and accepts the person as righteous for Christ's sake alone, this by faith, and this a gracious gift!

A. Sins pardoned.

First, in justification he pardons sins. Each of us carries a weighty load of sin—lying, cheating, stealing, envying, coveting, etc. This weight of sin has to be dealt with. We can't explain it away or hide it. God is the omniscient judge, he sees and knows all things. The LORD does not forget them, instead,

▪ Isaiah 53.11

He [Christ] shall see the labor of His soul and be satisfied; by His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.

Our sins are pardoned because Christ bears them in our place. He bears our iniquities. The load you could never carry, the load which is a crushing weight, the load that only seems doable because you pretend it is far smaller than it really is, can only be borne by the righteous Servant of God, the Messiah. Amen!

B. Accounted and accepted as righteous.

With that sin carried away by Christ, and his obedience imputed to us, we are accounted and accepted as righteous. I should define that word: *impute*. It means to reckon against. When we write a check against our bank account it is imputed against the funds available. When Christ bears our sin our wickedness is imputed to him while his obedience, his perfect righteousness, is imputed to us. Utterly amazing. Utterly astounding if you stop to think about it.

▪ Romans 4.8

Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute sin.

▪ Romans 4.6

[Blessed is] the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works.

We are blessed beyond what we can ask or think (Eph 3.20). Truly, our God is a loving God.

C. For Christ's sake alone.

1. By imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ.
2. For those who receive and rest on him and his righteousness by faith.

This love is not extended to everyone.

▪ **Malachi 1.2-3 / Romans 9.13**

Jacob I loved but Esau I hated.

It is for Christ's sake alone, and thus for those alone that have faith in the work of Christ on their behalf. Our faith is in God and his truth, to believe what he says and appropriate it for our personal lives. True, that faith is in something I cannot prove.

A few faces out there look concerned, "What do you mean, it can't be proved?!" I *do* believe that the sinless life of Christ and his resurrection can be proved, but apart from what the Bible says, there is no way to know that Christ's perfection and his resurrection accomplished anything for anyone. There is no physical evidence for the substitutionary atonement (which is what we are talking about here). Yes, there is evidence that Christ was sinless, that he was crucified, that he rose on the third day, that he ascended to heaven, that his disciples received supernatural power at Pentecost, etc. But nothing short of divine revelation, written for us here in the Bible, could ever inform us that the death of one man, Christ, justified many. Our faith (my faith) trusts what God says happened: the sins of the world (including my sins) were borne upon his shoulders; he rose from the grave so his people (me included) will rise from the grave one day.

If we aren't willing to submit to God's word, then we have nothing to hold onto. By faith we take him at his word, receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness.

D. It is the gift of God.

Finally, this faith is a gift of God. From first to last justification is a gracious gift. I read it earlier but let me repeat it again—Romans 4.6:

blessed is “**the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works.**” In that letter to the Romans Paul further explains that working and the gift nature are diametrical opposites. If we worked for it, it cannot be a gift. If it is a gift, it cannot be worked for.

- **2Corinthians 9.15 Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!**

IV. “...and shall glory.”

Well, the fact that this faith is a gift, and the work of Christ in which we have faith is given to us by God’s free mercy, clearly shows in what/in whom we should glory. In the Lord.

A. In the Lord.

Let me quote three Scriptures to make this even more clear.

- **Jeremiah 9.24**

But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I *am* the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth.

- **1Corinthians 1.31 / 2Corinthians 10.17**

But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is written, “*He who glories, let him glory in the LORD.*”

- **Romans 15.17**

Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ.

B. not in man.

Brothers and sisters, let us give praise to whom it is due. Resist the temptation to give yourself credit; whether that be by thinking, “at least I am not as bad as the other guy” or “good thing I avoided that train wreck unlike the poor fools over there”.

Conclusion

But for the grace of God go we. Or, as the apostle says it,

- **1Corinthians 6.9-11**

And such were some of you – speaking of fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers – **such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.**

You weren't washed by your good common sense; you had a depraved mind that enjoyed its sins, it only disliked the consequences.

You weren't sanctified by your attempts at living a moral life; your best works were as filthy rags.

You weren't justified by telling God, I'm not such a bad person after all; he who violates the law in one part is guilty of the whole thing.

***Let us glory in the one who has washed us, sanctified us, and justified us. With saints of old, let us glory in no one but the Lord, Christ, the one and only Savior.

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 - Ephesians 1.3

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 - 1Corinthians 15.22
- B. Continuity vs. Disunity.
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