

**“Justified”**  
**John 3:16;**  
**Galatians 2:15 - 24**

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

“We who are Jews by birth and not ‘Gentile sinners’ know that a person is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

“But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the ‘sinners,’ doesn’t that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker.

“For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”

Okay, by way of introduction this morning, if you were here last Sunday, tell the person next to you what it was about.

If you weren’t here or are a guest this morning – welcome – find someone who was.

Let’s take a few moments to do that.

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So last week we looked at... conflict and trying to do conflict and disagreements well.

So we looked at two accounts.

One in Acts of Paul’s and Barnabas’ volcanic dispute that saw them part ways.

And as we've been making our way through Galatians this in-your-face, finger-in-the-chest, public blow up between Paul and Peter who was clearly wrong. Conflicts are never pleasant; we are exhorted to "Make every effort – *to go all out* – to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."

But even in terrible conflicts God can bring about the good.

As I was talking after the service last week someone reminded me that Paul and Barnabas' missionary break up actually led to a greater spread of the gospel as they continued their preaching of King Jesus in different areas.

And in Galatians we find this powerful statement from Paul describing one of the great doctrines of the Christian faith – justification by faith in Jesus Christ.

Martin Luther called it the "doctrine by which "the church either stands or falls."

John Calvin said it was the hinge on which salvation turns.

They said this because it is the *only* means by which all humans can be brought back into connection, relationship with God.

They also saw a huge problem we all face – there is a great threat to our souls and it's that three letter word called 'sin'.

Sin.

Last year the New York Times, this highly secular newspaper, had these words:

During Lent, Christians talk a lot about sin, an idea that for many bears the mothball scent of a religious relic long packed away and best left forgotten. For some, the terms "sin" and "sinner" seem self-hating or judgmental.

For others, they sound silly, associated with things like lingerie and decadent chocolate cake, what [an] English writer deemed "enjoyable naughtiness."<sup>1</sup>

Of course when you do talk about sins, what response do you get?

"What is it with you Christians???. You're always banging on about sin! It's so *judgemental*; it's so *negative*."

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<sup>1</sup> [https://taxprof.typepad.com/taxprof\\_blog/2023/03/ny-times-op-ed-the-wages-of-idolatry.html](https://taxprof.typepad.com/taxprof_blog/2023/03/ny-times-op-ed-the-wages-of-idolatry.html)

How would you respond?  
Do we do it? Why we do it???

***“Why talk about sin?”***

Tell the person next to you.

A friend put it like this. He said:

“The irony is for the last two decades there has been a strange silence on sin amongst Christians and in our churches.”

That article I mentioned goes on to talk about how this ‘religious relic’ is still relevant in for a ‘sophisticated’, ‘progressive’ Western world today.

But we have to remind ourselves of this: Jesus talked about sin.

Jesus said that “from within, out of your hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile you.”

So when we talk about sin we are engaging in an act of truth-telling.

Human beings – all humans – have ‘sin’ problem.

I have a sin problem an you have a sin problem.

You see, you and I are flawed.

So for us when you read Scripture – the Old and New Testament – you come up against this multitude of ways in which sin is referred to.

Sometimes it is rebellion, at other times it is infidelity.

Sometimes it is referred to as disloyalty and breaking the faith, while in other places it is getting dirty and defiled.

Sometimes people in their sin are spoken of as wandering and going astray and becoming lost.

Sometimes it’s trespass and transgression, of overstepping a boundary, and often it’s about failure, missing the mark and breaking God’s law.

Sometimes it’s idolatry, doing wrong, being wicked and acting out of evil intent.

Sometimes it's in our boasting. The things you look at and say, that justifies me, that validates me, that's what makes me worthy.

Sin is a serious problem and Romans 3 verse 23 says what?

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"

And Romans 6:23 says, "The wages of sin is... death..."

However we talk about it, sin cuts us off from the source of life

Sin condemns, it enslaves.

It gets you in its grip.

The question then is,

***"What do we with these desires, these inclinations and actions that lead us into sin?"***

What other people do is they try to soften the blow.

We dodge the issue, *even in our churches.*

We downplay or even ignore sin, hoping it will go away and not put people off.

It's like this:

One day your laptop or device or PC goes on the blink.

So you take it to a computer repair shop. A few days later you get the call and that it's ready to be picked.

You take it home and... the issue remains. So you take it back and say to the repair person that you have the same issue.

He says to you reply, "Oh, yeah I know. I didn't want to upset you with the all problems. I wanted you to feel good. I didn't want to cause offence with the cost the real cost repairing would involve."

Or imagine a woman goes to a doctor for a check-up.

The doctor says to the woman, "You're in amazing shape. Your fitness is outstanding. You could run a marathon tomorrow, no problem at all."

The next day the woman has a massive heart attack and the staff in the hospital say to her, "Didn't your doctor warn you? You had all the indicators that a massive heart attack was coming your way."

So the woman calls up her doctor and says to him, “Why didn’t you tell me how bad my situation was? When it comes to my health, I want to know!”

And the doctor says, “I didn’t want to upset you.”

Every religion has some means or system to follow.

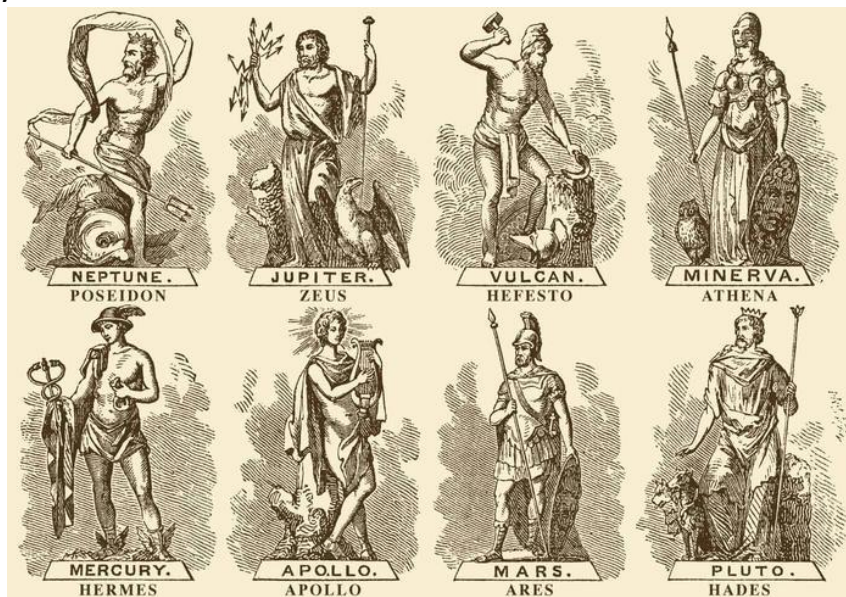
We take this for granted and yet the gods of the Greeks and Romans were capricious, egotistical, cunning and couldn’t be trusted.

They had human-like appetites and petty emotions.

They acted on whims of the moment and out of self-interest. They were unpredictable.

These gods exemplified the worst traits of human beings – and they needed to be constantly appeased.

And you couldn’t say “Zeus loves me” or “Apollo loves me” or any other number of pagan gods that were and still are worshipped in our world today.



It was radical to suggest otherwise.

So ancient people were in a constant state of appeasement, trying to earn the favour of the gods.

For the Jews God was seen differently.

God was good and just and loving.

God had chosen Israel – the Jewish people – and the law was a gift.

It governed their whole lives.

It made them a set apart people for God.

It pointed to what God is like and wants for his world.  
And it was one way of restraining the destructive power of sin.  
But... although it could restrain sin it couldn't destroy the power of sin completely – especially sin found in the human heart.

Law can help govern human actions but sin goes much, much deeper – deep into our souls, into our affections and inclinations.

As Paul writes “We who are Jews by birth know that a person is not justified by observing the law... because by observing the law *no one* will be justified.”  
And that applies to any human moral code or even our own consciences.

So what will God do with disloyal human beings?

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son so that whoever believes in him shall have eternal life”.

“A person is made right with God through faith in Jesus Christ...  
We have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ... The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Justification is legal term found in the law court.  
It is to be declared ‘Not guilty’.

To be justified by faith in Jesus Christ is to trust that Jesus as our representative – the innocent one – suffered and died for us and when he did he bore on himself our sins, our rebellion, our disloyalty.  
He died our death and bore our punishment.

In return God gave us pardon, forgiveness, cleansing, acceptance and approval.  
He's declares us not guilty because of Christ.

Not only that but Jesus perfect righteousness is counted as ours.  
Righteousness is like a performance record. It's a life pleasing to God.  
And Jesus lived a life completely pleasing to God in every way.  
That righteousness becomes ours through faith.  
The Reformers would say it is ‘imputed’ to us; assigned to us.

So we can come become welcomed and embraced.

We have nothing to offer God to atone for our wrongdoing, our disloyalty, our sin.

Absolutely nothing.

That can offend us but it's true.

This an act of God's pure grace – his unearned, unmerited, undeserved favour and kindness.

Apart from Jesus we will perish.

God in his love says, you don't have perish.

He says, I have given you my Son Jesus.

Now at this point, some people will say, "Well, what about the 'good' people of this world, people who live more moral lives than I do?"

People like Mahatma Gandhi?

Gandhi never became a follower of Jesus. He deeply appreciated some of Christ's teaching but could not accept Jesus' self-definition of Himself – that He is the only way. But Gandhi did a lot of good.

And yet, some people who get all the advantages in life, which enable them to be "good".

I mean, Gandhi was raised in a middle class family and was able to get a law degree. He had a head start in life and so had the wherewithal to do good things.

But what of those who have not had such advantages.

Justification by faith is incredibly fair.

You see, what of those who have been brought up in dysfunctional families and as children have been deeply hurt. And because of their backgrounds they just can't get their act together.

They're too hurt and twisted up to be good.

If it comes down to goodness, a lot of us haven't got a show of being acceptable to God.

And you see, this is where the good news of King Jesus is so much better and fairer and more inclusive.

Justification by faith in Jesus is one of the fairest inclusive statements around!

The gospel of King Jesus is that moral failures, whoever and wherever they are, once forgiven by Christ, are fully accepted by God. That no matter what you have done or who you are, you can still be embraced fully and instantly by Jesus.

John 3:16 and Galatians 2 encapsulate the good news of King Jesus.

The good news of King Jesus is that I am so flawed that Jesus had to die for me, yet I am so loved and valued that Jesus was glad to die for me.

The good news of King Jesus is that you are so flawed that Jesus had to die for you, yet you are so loved and valued that Jesus was glad to die for you.

It doesn't matter if you are gay or trans or straight or whatever... you are flawed and you are loved.

It doesn't matter if you are Israeli or Palestinian... you are flawed and you are loved.

It doesn't matter if you are Maori or Pakeha... you are loved.

It doesn't matter if you feel you have made a mess of your life... you are loved.

You are loved uniquely.

You are loved individually.

God gave His Son for you so you don't have to perish.

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What about you this morning?

Are you laid all your attempts to gain your worth, your value, your approval, your acceptance apart from what Jesus has done.