

Romans 4:25 - "*(Jesus) was handed over to **death** because of **our trespasses** and was raised to **life** because of **our justification**.*"

If I were to ask you the question, "What has Jesus **done** for you?" many of you would probably answer, "Jesus **died** on the **cross** to pay for my **sins**." That's a good answer, and the Apostle Paul said pretty much the same thing in the first half of our text for today, "*(Jesus) was handed over to **death** because of **our trespasses**.*" Even young **children** understand what happened during those crucial hours of **Good Friday**, and what it **means** for them. But, while most of us would focus on the events of Good Friday, only a **few** would mention what Jesus did **today** - on **Easter Sunday**.

It's not that we don't **know** what happened on Easter. We certainly **do**. We confess it every Sunday in the **creed** by saying, "*On the third day he **rose** again from the **dead**.*" In fact, we **greeted** each other at the beginning of our service today by saying, "*The **LORD** is **risen!** He is risen **indeed!***" That's the **focus** of Easter Sunday - and it's a pretty **big** deal. What **makes** it such a big deal? Well for starters, a resurrection from the dead clearly **reveals** something about the one who **performs** it. Just a short time **before** Easter, **Jesus** had raised **Lazarus** from the dead, and by **doing** so, Jesus **revealed** that He was truly the **Son of God**. It was a **clear** statement that Jesus had **power** - even power over **death**.

So, the question this **morning** is, who performed **Jesus'** resurrection, and what was He **revealing** by performing it? According to Paul in the **second** half of our text, "*(Jesus) **Was Raised To Life***" - that's a **passive** verb, which indicates that someone **other** than Jesus **raised Him** from the dead. My **guess** is that **many** of us don't usually **think** about His resurrection that way. We think about Jesus raising **Himself** from the dead. After all, in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds we have **active verbs**, and we confess, "*The third day **he rose** again.*" In John's **Gospel**, Jesus referred to His **body** and said, "*Destroy this temple, and in three days **I will raise it up** again.*" So, why does our **text** today speak about Jesus being **raised** from the dead? Why does Peter say in his sermon on **Pentecost**, "*He is the one **God raised up?***" And what **statement** is God making by **raising** Jesus from the dead?

Our text for today gives us the **answer**. Paul says, "*(He) was raised to **life** because of **our justification**.*" There are a lot of **technical terms** used in the Bible. All of them are **important**, because they're all part of God's **Word**. For example, it's good for us to know what the Bible means when it uses the word "**discipline**," so we don't get it confused with how the **world** often defines that term. It's good to

know the meaning of terms like **prophet, priest, and king** - especially as they refer to **Jesus** and describe His **work**. It's good to know the meaning of terms like **righteousness, and holiness**, and what their meanings say about **God** - and about **us**. It's good to know the meaning of the term **sanctification**, and how it's **different** from **justification**. But of all the terms in the Bible, that **last** one - **justification** - may very well be the **most** important - the most **crucial** one for us to understand. While we may not hear that term very **often** on an Easter Sunday, it is most **definitely** an **Easter** term.

Justification is really a **courtroom** term. It pictures a **judge** rendering a verdict of **not guilty**. So to **justify** is to **declare** not guilty. We often talk about people justifying their **actions**. When they **do** that, they're essentially saying that under normal circumstances they did something **wrong**. But they want us to believe that these were **not** normal circumstances. Therefore, they should be declared **not guilty**

Sometimes we want to **hear** that verdict from a **particular** person - perhaps one of our **parents** - or perhaps our **spouse**. But sometimes it's even an actual **judge**, and what the **judge** has to say is **vitaly important**. If we were on trial for a capital **crime**, we might plead our case to our **friends**, and find them to a very **sympathetic** and **supportive** audience - maybe even to the point of **ignoring** the facts. We might plead our case to our **lawyers**, and after hearing the **evidence** they might believe that we're **innocent**. We may have every single person in the courtroom nodding along with us, and **agreeing** with what we have to say. But none of it **means** anything unless the **judge** declares us to be **not guilty**.

The one whom we need to justify **us** - to declare us **not guilty** - is **God**. He is the one we've committed our **crimes** against, and I'm not talking about **minor** crimes. There is **no such thing** as a **minor** crime against **God**. **Every** sin we commit is a **capital** crime. **Every** sin we commit makes us worthy of eternal **death** and **condemnation**.

It doesn't **matter** what anyone **else** thinks or says. We can talk to others and perhaps **convince** them to agree with us that the sins we've committed aren't really **deserving** of death and condemnation. We might be able to convince them that what we've done isn't even **wrong**. They may nod in **agreement**, and even declare us to be **not guilty**. But none of that really **matters**. What **matters** is what **God** says about our sins. His Word says that we **do sin** against Him in our **thoughts, words, and actions** - making us **guilty** before Him, and deserving of **death**. No

matter how hard we try to **justify** ourselves and our actions, we can never do or say **enough** to **compel** God to say that we are **not guilty**.

That's where **Jesus** comes into the picture. When we look at Jesus' life in the **Gospels**, we can clearly see for **ourselves** that He lived a **perfect** life. We would certainly **declare** Him to be **not guilty**. During the Lenten season we heard both **Pontius Pilate**, and the **thief** on the cross, **declare** that Jesus had done **nothing wrong**. And just before He died on the cross, Jesus justified **Himself** with the words, "*It is **finished**.*" Jesus had done **every last thing** the Father had **sent** Him to do. Knowing all **that**, it shouldn't be surprising at all to hear that God was making a **not guilty** declaration through the **resurrection** of Jesus from the dead. It's only when we grasp what Jesus had come to **do**, that we ultimately **understand** what God's declaration of **not guilty** on Easter morning really **meant**.

Jesus told us that He had been sent to this earth by His Father not only to **live** a perfect **life**, but also to **give** that perfect life as **payment** for the sins of the world - making **us** not guilty. So, when Jesus said on Good Friday, "*It is **finished**,*" it **meant** something to us. It was **wonderful** to hear our **defense** attorney - the one who knows God's law **perfectly** - saying that the work He had been sent to do is **finished**, and therefore that **we are not guilty**.

But God the **Father** still hadn't put **His** seal of approval on the work of Jesus. That didn't come until the **third day**. But when it **did** come, it came with resounding **certainty**. When God the Father **raised** Jesus to life on Easter Sunday, it was the **clearest** declaration of **all** that Jesus was **not guilty** - and because **Jesus** was not guilty, **we are not guilty either**. Listen again to the words of our text, "*(Jesus) was handed over to **death** because of our **trespasses** and was raised to **life** because of our **justification**.*" It doesn't say that He died and rose for **His** justification - it was for **our** justification. That **one word** makes all the difference: "*He was raised to life for **our** justification.*" **All of us** were declared to be **not guilty** at the empty tomb of Jesus, because when God **raised** Jesus to life, He **justified us** - declaring us to be **innocent**, and **worthy** to inherit eternal life.

Sometimes around Easter time we'll hear people say that Easter isn't about the special **breakfast**, or **egg hunts**, or **bunnies**, or **candy**. And they're **right**. Easter is about **Jesus** - but it's not **only** about Jesus. In fact, it's really about **us too**. Because **Jesus Was Raised To Life** on Easter morning, **we** have been set **free** from the prison of **sin**, and the fear of **death**. Easter is about **us** being declared **not guilty** by the one whose judgment **matters** above all else. It's about us being **justified** by God the Father. On this Easter morning and **always**, hank God that He

sent Jesus to be our Savior - that Jesus completed His work **perfectly** - and that **we** have been declared **not guilty**. Amen.