

JUSTIFICATION

Court-room Language

Justification is directly related to 'righteousness' as can be more easily seen with a simple study of Greek:

δικαιοσύνη	dikaiousunē	(noun)	righteousness
δίκαιος	dikaios	(adjective)	righteous
δικαίω	dikaioō	(verb)	to declare righteous (to justify)

To be justified is to be 'declared righteous.' The Bible tells us that we are justified by faith in Jesus. (Romans 5:1-2)

THE STORY OF BARABBAS

Barabbas was a notorious prisoner who was guilty of murder and insurrection. He was scheduled to receive the death penalty for his crime. His name is significant: Bar Abbas = 'Son of the Father' in Aramaic (some early Greek Manuscripts of Mt. 27 record his full name as Jesus Barabbas). Three gospels state that there was a custom at Passover during which the Roman governor would release a prisoner of the crowd's choice: Mark 15:6; Matthew 27:15; and John 18:39.

When Jesus went through his public trial prior to his execution, the judge (Pontius Pilate) repeatedly declared that he was guilty of no crime (in fact the gospels point out that Jesus was profoundly innocent). Yet, Jesus was condemned to die (on account of the sin and evil of the crowds assembled). Because Jesus was condemned to die, Barabbas is set free and lives. All four Gospels recount this historical fact for an important reason: Barabbas is a picture of salvation and substitution.

We can imagine how it was for Barabbas. He is guilty; he knows he is guilty; he is awaiting his punishment, namely death. The soldiers come to his cell on the morning of his scheduled execution. The time has come. But instead of taking him to his spot of execution, the soldiers say, "Barabbas, get up and go free."

"What?"

"Jesus, has been executed in your place. You are free to go."

We can imagine Barabbas walking the streets of Jerusalem a free man. Maybe he even viewed the cross of Jesus. "I'm alive, because he died in my place."

OUR STORY

The Bible says plainly that each of us faces a trial one day. 2 Cor. 5:10 "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." 1 Cor. 4:5 "He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts."

On the day of our trial as we stand before a completely holy God, we will know that we are profoundly guilty and worthy of punishment, namely death. We may even anticipate now that we will fall to our knees in a sense of doom. But instead, we may hear words similar to Barabbas.

"Christian, get up and go free."

"What?"

"Jesus, has been executed in your place. You are free to go."

We can imagine walking the streets of the New Jerusalem, thinking of the cross of Jesus: "I'm alive, because he died in my place."

Heidelberg Catechism

Q&A 38 Why did he suffer 'under Pontius Pilate' as judge?

So that he, though innocent, might be condemned by a civil judge, and so free us from the severe judgment of God that was to fall on us.

Q&A 52 How does Christ's return 'to judge the living and the dead' comfort you?

In all my distress and persecution I turn my eyes to the heavens and confidently await as judge the very One who has already stood trial in my place before God and so has removed the whole curse from me. All his enemies and mine he will condemn to everlasting punishment: but me and all his chosen ones he will take along with him into the joy and glory of heaven.

Memory aid

Justified

"Just as if I'd..."

...never sinned nor been a sinner

...been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me

Suppose you were a school principal who witnessed one student punch and knock out another student. You rush to the scene of the incident and prepare to expel the offending student. At the scene, someone urges you to look in the coat of the student who has been knocked out, and you discover several guns. Suddenly the way you judge this incident has changed. You no longer judge the student to be a villain, but a hero. The underlying actions haven't changed, but the grid through which you are making your judgment has changed. You now believe the student was 'justified' in punching and knocking out the other student. So also with us. The things we have done throughout life have not changed, but the grid through which we are judged has. Jesus becomes the grid through which God judges us. God now sees that Jesus, though innocent, has already received the punishment for our crimes. Therefore, we stand justified before God.