**What Is The Gospel? (Andy Acreman, TCF)**

**Week 3 – Righteousness as a Gift Through Faith**

We recall that the New Covenant was first revealed in the ancient prophecy of Jeremiah, in the Old Testament: *Jeremiah 31:33-34 NIV*

*“This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time”, declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbour, or say to one another, ‘Know the LORD’, because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest”, declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more”.*

This prophecy is also quoted *in full* in Hebrews 8:8-12 and *partially* in other New Testament passages.

We saw that there are three main kinds of benefit promised here:

1. Judicial Innocence – in the courtroom – dealing with punishment
2. Inner Christlikeness – the prison – dealing with slavery
3. Blessings of a Close Relationship with God – the leper colony – curing isolation
4. **Righteousness as a Gift, Through Faith**

* So today we consider this ‘Judicial Innocence’ and how we obtain it from God. Our key passage from Romans is…

***Romans 3:21-25a ESV***

***But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it - [22] the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.*** *For there is no distinction: [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,* ***[24] and are justified by his grace as a gift,*** *through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, [25] whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood,* ***to be received by faith...***

**Key Questions:**

* **What *is* Righteousness?**
* **What *is* Justification?**
* **How do we Receive these?**
* **Not by Works!**
* **What does Justification ‘fix’?**

**What *is* Righteousness?**

* For a person to *be* ‘righteous’, is for them to be ***completely acceptable*** to God. This is a *moral and spiritual acceptance.*
* But symbolically, it is like wearing the correct ‘uniform’ or the ‘dress code’ for some important gathering.
* E.g. School uniform inspections… (Skirts were measured, ties examined, shoes scrutinised; pupils sent home!) Police force inspections… Funeral attire… Parable of the wedding in Matthew 22. [See Images]. Humanly, it doesn’t matter what’s going on in your head, it’s your appearance that defines your status.
* Spiritually, if God accepts us, we are righteous. *Isaiah 61:10 NIV. I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a* ***robe of his righteousness****, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.*
* The first person mentioned in the Bible as being ‘righteous’ is **Noah** (Genesis 6:9; 7:1). Then **Abraham** (Genesis 15:6 NIV. *Abram believed God, and he credited it to him as righteousness.).* **Job** was described as ‘blameless’ in Job 1:1. **Joseph**, in Matthew 1:19 was called a ‘righteous man’. So was **Joseph of Arimathea** (Luke 23:50). Not forgetting **Abel** (Hebrews 11:4). Yet *none* of them was perfect.
* Biblically, to be righteous means to be free of sin, fully obedient to God’s Law, and completely submitted to His will. *And* to be perfect in all aspects. Not a speck or a crease or a stain. Which is a bit of a problem for us!
* *James 2:10 NIV. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.*
* Are there many people today would themselves qualify as ‘righteous’? No!
* *Romans 3:10 NIV. As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one…”.*
* Mankind *was* righteous in the Garden, just after being created, but lost that by sinning. So these people in the Old Testament that I mentioned must have obtained righteousness in some other way! (More of that later!)
* (Sometimes in scripture, the phrase ‘acting righteously’ can signify living a good and honourable life, doing your best to serve the Lord, acting as a righteous person *ought to,* but it doesn’t mean full acceptance by God.)
* Have I missed anyone out? Yes, Jesus himself. 1 John 2:1 NIV. *… if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father - Jesus Christ,* ***the Righteous One****.*
* God the Father too. *Psalm 4:1a NIV. Answer me when I call to you,* ***my righteous God.***
* How did Jesus obtain righteousness? He obeyed the Law. *Deuteronomy 6:25 NIV. “…And if we are careful to obey* ***all*** *this law before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us,* ***that*** *will be our righteousness." Romans 2:13 NIV. “For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous”.*
* Jesus successfully did this: *Matthew 5:17 NIV. "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to* ***fulfil*** *them.* (‘Fulfil’ = ‘Complete’).
* *Hebrews 4:15 NIV. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one [Jesus] who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet he did not sin.*
* But Jesus was *already* righteous. Why did he need to spend all that time obeying the Law (which He Himself had originally written for Moses)? It was not for His sake, but later for *our* sakes. Remember when Jesus was baptised and John the Baptist tried to deter him? *Matthew 3:15 NIV. Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil* ***all righteousness****."* (i.e. *ours*).

**What is ‘Justification’?**

* **God *declaring* that we have been forgiven and have been credited with the Righteousness of Christ.**
* **The Judge acquitting us in court! “Not Guilty!”. Innocent.**
* E.g. A police officer’s warrant card. Proof of identity, status and authority, a declaration signed by the Chief Constable of the force.
* Notice that Justification is a legal event, that took place in the Court of Heaven. It is ‘external’ to us. It doesn’t say how good we are inside, or how hard we have worked, it just says that God has decreed us to be acceptable to Him. Similarly, the policeman’s warrant card doesn’t tell us how good a police officer he/she is, but just that they have the status of one – with its powers and responsibilities.

**How Do We Receive Justification?**

***Romans 3:21-25a ESV***

***But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it - [22] the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.*** *For there is no distinction: [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,* ***[24] and are justified by his grace as a gift,*** *through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, [25] whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood,* ***to be received by faith...***

*2 Corinthians 5:21 NIV.*

*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that* ***in him we might become the righteousness of God****.*

*Romans 4:3-5 NIV.*

*What does Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and* ***it was credited to him as righteousness****." [4] Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. [5] However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly,* ***their faith is credited as righteousness****.*

* So we see that faith in Christ’s death and resurrection enables God to transfer ‘righteousness’ to our spiritual bank account. We become the righteousness of God. We are as acceptable to the Father as Jesus is to Him. When He sees *us*, He sees *Jesus*. There is nothing to pay, and nothing to earn! Jesus paid it all!
* **Let’s declare together:** *“I am the righteousness of God”.*
* *[24]**[we] are justified* ***by his grace as a gift,*** *through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, [25] whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood,**to be received by faith...*
* So through His *grace (a free gift)*, God provided Jesus as our Redeemer. By faith we grasp hold of the gift of salvation.
* We are much more than just forgiven; we have been given *positive* righteousness.
* **Faith** is three things in one: Knowledge of the Truth, agreement with the Truth, trust and commitment to the Truth.
* Faith looks at Jesus, not at ourselves. Faith does not save us; Jesus does
* *“But* ***NOW****…”* – we are *in* the new age! Historical faith. Based on fact.

**Not by Works!**

*Romans 3:21,28 NIV. But now* ***apart from the law*** *the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify… [28] For we maintain that a person is justified by faith* ***apart from the works of the law****.*

*Galatians 2:16b,21 NIV. …[We] know that a person is* ***not justified by the works of 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 the works of the law****, because* ***by the works of the law no one will be justified****… [21] I do not set aside the grace of God, for* ***if righteousness could be gained through the law,*** *Christ died for nothing!"*

* We cannot *add* to our salvation, we cannot *earn* our salvation, we cannot *gain credit* for our salvation. Much as we would like to! (Like flying a Spitfire. Organ.)
* That would simply be a source of pride, so that we could boast. No room for that:

*Ephesians 2:8-9 NIV. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith -* ***and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God*** *- not by works, so that no one can boast.*

* Important to notice that we cannot even claim credit for our ***faith***. *This also* is a gift from God (see also 1 Peter 1:21; Philippians 1:29; 1 Corinthians 1:30; Acts 13:48). *Otherwise,* our faith would be just another kind of ‘work’ that we could boast about. Faith is simply God’s instrument to credit us with His righteousness. It’s really all about grace!

**What Does Justification ‘Fix’?**

*Romans 8:1 NIV. Therefore, there is now* ***no condemnation*** *for those who are in Christ Jesus…*

* We are no longer subject to the judgment of God and the punishment for our sins. Justification is *the* antidote for condemnation!
* Romans 5:1… ***Having been justified by faith…* Aorist tense** (past completed, done once and for ever). You only need to be justified *once* – it lasts for eternity!
* If we think we are condemned, it must be the ‘evil one’, not the Holy Spirit. Condemnation is a general feeling of dissatisfaction at yourself, but with no specifics to repent of. The Holy Spirit’s *conviction* is always highly specific.
* *Revelation 12:10b-11a NIV. …For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. [11] They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony…*
* When Satan accuses us before God, he no longer has any grounds to demand our condemnation. The Blood of the Lamb has taken away our punishment entirely. Justification undermines the enemy’s entire strategy in attacking us.

*Romans 5:1-2 NIV. Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have* ***peace with God*** *through our Lord Jesus Christ, [2] through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.*

* We were once God’s enemies; we were ‘at war’ with Him. Now, however, we are ‘at peace’ and on the same side. Do we actually *believe* this?
* Notice it is ‘Peace ***with***God’, *not* ‘The Peace ***of***God’ (which transcends all understanding – Philippians 4:7) that it refers to here. Can’t have the second without the first, though.

*Hebrews 10:19-22 NIV. Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, [20] by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, [21] and since we have a great priest over the house of God,* *[22] let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the* ***full assurance*** *that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.*

* Do *we* have that full assurance inside us that we are saved? Genuine faith brings this to our spirits.

*Hebrews 2:14-15 NIV. Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death-that is, the devil- [15] and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by* ***their fear of death****.*

* We may not relish the *process* of dying, but we should now have lost our fear of death itself – since our loving Saviour and Lord will be there to greet us.

*[22] let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to* ***cleanse us from a guilty conscience*** *and having our bodies washed with pure water.*

* Our consciences are not perfect, and often a ‘weak’ conscience will be self-condemnatory and harsh with us. But justification nevertheless cleanses us from any guilt for past or present sins.

**Summary**

* **Righteousness is being completely acceptable to God**
* **Justification is where God declares you to be Righteous**
* **We receive these by GRACE through FAITH**
* **Never by good works / obeying the Law – impossible!**
* **Justification ‘fixes’…**
  + **Condemnation / accusation / punishment;**
  + **War with God; - Fear of Death;**
  + **Doubt about our destiny; - Guilty Conscience.**

*No condemnation now I dread; Jesus, and all in Him is mine!*

*Alive in Him, my living Head, And clothed in righteousness divine,*

*Bold, I approach the eternal throne,*

*And claim the crown, through Christ my own.*