Sermon Series: What Does It Mean to Be Saved?
Sermon Title: Not Guilty

Text: **Romans 5:1-11 -- Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 3 More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. 6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— 8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. 10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. 11 More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation**.

Introduction: Born in **1483** as the son of a miner, Martin Luther had every intention of becoming a lawyer until one day in **1505,** when he was caught in a thunderstorm while walking to a local village. A bolt of lightning knocked him to the ground, causing the terrified young man to call out to *the patroness of miners*, "***St. Anne. Save me and I'll become a monk***!" Much to his parents' dismay, two weeks later, Luther kept his vow and entered an Augustinian Monastery. In no time, he proved himself to be very dedicated to his calling. So much so that later he said of his devotion, "***I kept the rule so strictly that I may say that if ever a monk got to heaven by his sheer monkery, it was I***." In an effort to prove his sincerity to God, it was not uncommon for Luther to fast for days and sleep without a blanket in the freezing winter. He was driven by a profound sense of his own sinfulness and God's majesty. ***Yet no amount of penance was able to remove Luther's conviction that he was nothing more than a doomed sinner***. This did not change for him until he began to study the Scripture for himself. As he did, a new and revolutionary understanding of God began to develop in his restless soul. Finally, in **1515,** while meditating on **Romans 1:17** (***the just shall live by faith***), he started to understand that man can only be saved by faith in the merit of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. At the same time, he saw how this doctrine clashed with the Roman church's teaching that man is justified by faith and good works. It didn't take long for Martin Luther to get his message out to all who would listen. After a short time, word of his "**heresies**" made its way back to Rome. The result was a document bearing the seal of the Roman Church that circulated throughout Germany in the summer of 1520, in search of the rebellious monk. "**Arise, O Lord**," it began, "**and judge Thy cause. A wild boar has invaded the kingdom**." It took several months before this papal bull reached Martin Luther, condemning forty-one of his beliefs as heretical and calling on him to repent or face the dreadful consequences of excommunication. Not only did he refuse the demands of the church in Rome, but Martin Luther publicly burned the document along with several copies of the Canon Law outside the town of Wittenberg and in so doing provided much fuel for what we know today as ***the Protestant Reformation.*** The cry that eventually resulted in so many breaking with the Roman tradition was none other than "**The Just shall live by faith**."

Well, this is the 7th message in our series, ***What Does It Mean to Be Saved***. So far, we've talked about God's common grace, election, effective calling, regeneration, conversion, and the atonement. **Why are we taking time to do this?** Because what we believe about God and man really matters. It dictates how we choose to live according to **Romans 12:2**. So today I invite you to spend the next twenty-five minutes and join me as we take a closer look at the clarion call of the reformation---the doctrine of justification.

The Meaning of Justification. Both the Hebrew ('*tsadaq*'—**See Job 4:17**) and Greek ('*dikaioo*'—**See Romans 2:13**) words for justify or justification mean **to announce or pronounce a favorable verdict—to declare as righteous**. **Wayne Grudem** defines justification in this way: **It is an instantaneous legal act of God in which He thinks of our sins as forgiven and Christ's righteousness belonging to us, and declares us to be righteous in His sight** (**Grudem, Systematic Theology, p. 723**). Let me point out a couple of things regarding the nature of justification.

- **It is an instantaneous act**. It follows immediately after one repents of his sin and exercises faith in Christ as Savior and Lord (**Romans 5:1 -- Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; Galatians 2:16 -- we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ**). At the very moment that a believer puts his faith in Christ, God declares that person to be just/righteous.
- **It is a legal act**. **As I said earlier, to be justified is to be declared not guilty of the charges brought against you**. In a court of law, when a verdict is handed down, it either acknowledges a person's guilt or innocence. ***The verdict does not make a person wicked or righteous, but simply recognizes whether he is wicked or righteous***. This is the way the word is used in **Luke 7:29 -- When all the people heard this (Jesus' words about John the Baptist), and the tax collectors too, they declared God just**. None of us would argue that they were somehow making Him righteous. Rather, they were simply observing that He was. The ***Old Testament*** provides another example, when it contrasts the condemned with those who are justified in **1 Kings 8:31-32 -- "If a man sins against his neighbor and is made to take an oath and comes and swears his oath before your altar in this house, 32 then hear in heaven and act and judge your servants, condemning the guilty by bringing his conduct on his own head, and vindicating the righteous by rewarding him according to his righteousness**. Neither of these findings handed down by God made the people wicked or righteous. **The wicked were already wicked and the righteous already righteous prior to God's judgment of them**. He simply rendered a verdict for both, condemning some while declaring others to be just. This is justification.

The Source of Justification. **There has been much confusion about the basis for justification over the centuries**. What does the Bible say about its source? It teaches that the moment we believe in Christ, ***God, through a wonderful act of GRACE, credits Christ's RIGHTEOUSNESS to our account***.

- **The Grace of God** (**Philippians 3:8-9 -- For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes THROUGH faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith**). Grace is unmerited favor. It refers to something good we receive that we did not earn. **When we take a close look at the Bible, we realize that it does not teach that we are justified because we have faith, IF WHAT WE MEAN BY THIS IS THAT FAITH is our human contribution to the whole recipe for being declared just by God**. ***No--the Bible teaches that this righteousness comes from God THROUGH – NOT BECAUSE OF FAITH in Christ alone***. It is solely based on God's grace (**See Ephesians 2:8-9**). **If you're struggling with this idea, try to think of it this way**: If you receive a gift from someone, you might say that ***the means for accepting it involved reaching out your hands and taking hold of it.*** You would not, however, want to argue that you earned the gift by doing this. Why? Because you know that the person who gave you the present was the one who earned the money or resources to purchase it. All you did was receive it with humility and gratitude. ***Why is this distinction important?*** **Because historically, the church has gotten itself into a lot of trouble when it has made justification dependent on a mixture of faith and works**. This has been the error of virtually every false cult and even much of ***the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification***. At the ***Council of Trent*** and in response to the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Church took the position that the process of justification whereby a sinner was made righteous is a mixture of FAITH, BAPTISM, THE SACRAMENTS AND GRACE. Our Lord, on the other hand, taught that we are justified solely on the basis of God's

mercy and favor. This is the point of the parable Jesus told in **Luke 18:9-14—He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: 10 "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' 13 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." Unlike the Pharisee, who believed he deserved heaven because of his own righteousness, the tax collector asked God to be gracious toward him, a sinner who knew that he was out of favor with God. And, according to our Lord, He was the one who was justified**.

- **The Righteousness of Christ** (**Romans 5:17 --If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ**). **Because man is not righteous** (**John 16:8 – The Holy Spirit was sent to convict mankind of our lack of righteousness**) **and only the righteous will escape God's judgment** (**Matthew 13:49-50 -- So it will be at the close of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous 50 and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth**), **we need to acquire righteousness from a source other than ourselves**. This is where Jesus comes in. At the cross, God made Jesus, who never sinned, to become sin for us that we might become righteous beings (**See 2 Corinthians 5:21**). At the moment that Christ's righteousness is imputed to us, we are declared "***not guilty***" of sin. **It is not to say as some do that justification means that God now looks at me "*just-as-if-I'd-never sinned*". Why not? Because I have sinned and God has poured His wrath out on His Son as a result**. For all eternity I will remember that I am a former sinner that was forgiven and now in the righteousness of Christ I stand before God as a saint. Perhaps a better way to think of it is not that as SAINTS we will no longer remember our sin, but that God will no longer remember our sin against us so that a debt still needs to be paid (**See Hebrews 10:17-18**).

  Dr. Roy Gustafson offers this illustration of justification. It seems that there was a man in England who put his Rolls-Royce on a boat and went across the English Channel to go on a little vacation. While he was driving around Europe, something happened to the motor of his car. He cabled the Rolls-Royce people back in England, "***I'm having trouble with my car; what do you suggest I do***?" Well, the Rolls-Royce people flew a mechanic over! The mechanic repaired the car and flew back to England and left the man to continue on in his travels. As you can imagine, the fellow was wondering, "***How much is this going to cost me***?" So, when he got back to England, he wrote the people a letter and asked how much he owed them. He received a letter from the office that read: "***Dear Sir: There is no record anywhere in our files that anything ever went wrong with a Rolls-Royce***." **Once God credits Christ's righteousness to our account, He wipes the slate clean so that the thought that any more payment for our moral breakdowns is absurd**.

The Blessings of Justification.

- **PEACE WITH GOD** (**Romans 5:1 -- Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ**). The peace that Paul mentions here is not a feeling, but a fact. It means that we who were formerly enemies of God (**See Romans 5:10**) are now at peace with Him having been justified by Christ and declared to be righteous. The words "we have peace" are in the present tense meaning that it is ongoing and continual. Believers do not have to worry that something

might happen that would cancel the peace. **God is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness** (**1 John 1:9**).

- **HOPE IN LIFE** (**Romans 5:2 -- Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God**). Having been justified by Christ, we can be confidant that someday we too will know what it's like to live unencumbered by sin (**the glory of God is His sinlessness** – **For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God -- Romans 3:23**). This hope is not only something to look forward to when Christ returns, but is meant to sustain us today through the difficult times of life. Believers who respond to suffering with the right attitude will find their hope strengthened (**Romans 5:3-5 -- More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us**). PEACE AND HOPE. TWO THINGS THAT SEEM TO BE IN SHORT SUPPLY TODAY, BUT ARE OURS BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST.

Conclusion: **The just shall live by faith**. It was the cry of the reformation and it must continue to be the benchmark by which we judge Christian orthodoxy. Through His death on the cross, Christ took our sin and exchanged it for His righteousness. Thus, we are declared just before the Holy God of Heaven.

I was reading a bit ago about an Ironman competition. It involves a 3.8 km swim, followed by a 180 km cycle, and ending with the traditional 42 km marathon run. It **is not, however, just a physical fitness competition, but a battle of the mind**. In the race, all of a racer's self-doubts and inner demons rise to the surface, especially if a competitor doesn't know his or her own strengths and weaknesses. Among the mental tricks that helps competitors when the "***babble***" comes up is known as "***treeing***." **If a negative thought comes up it is often hard to switch it to a positive. In an effort to reorient themselves, the competitors will run up to a tree, touch it and thus, give the negative emotions to the tree**. The "***babble***" settles down and they are able to continue on. When we become a Christian, in a very real sense we "tree" our sin. ***We touch the cross and the Savior that hung there; giving Him our sin and guilt, and taking from him His righteousness. With everything now aright, we are able to run the race God has set before us***.