**Romans 4:25 He was handed over to death because of our trespasses and was raised to life because of our justification.**

God’s Declaration about you.

What did Jesus do for you? If you ask that question of the youngest of Christians, many will say, “He died on the cross to save me from my sins.” That’s a good answer. Sunday school children understand what happened during those crucial hours of Good Friday and what it means for them. So did the Apostle Paul who wrote Romans. **He was handed over to death because of our trespasses.**

While even the youngest get what Jesus did on the cross and talk about what happened on Good Friday when asked what Jesus has done for them, few would mention what occurred on Easter. For that matter, Christian adults often don’t specifically mention Jesus’ resurrection either.

We know what happened on Easter. We know when Jesus follows went the tomb, they found that on the third day he rose again from the dead. We didn’t get up today to tell our fellow Christian “Oh, what a beautiful morning.” No, we say, “Christ is risen!” and some others respond with “He is risen indeed!” That’s what happen on Easter and it’s a big deal.

What makes it a big deal, the biggest deal? Resurrection clearly reveals something about the one who does the resurrecting. Example: shortly before Easter, Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead. By doing so, Jesus revealed that he has power over death. It was a clear action that he is truly the Son of God.

Who preformed Jesus’ resurrection and what was he saying by performing it? Pay careful attention to what is said. **Was raised** indicates that someone other than Jesus raised him from the dead.

It’s a guess but do you include that in your normal thoughts about Jesus’ resurrection? Most of us, first think about Jesus raising himself from the dead. It’s true to think that way. Jesus himself attests that he rose from the dead. *Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again* (John 2:19). There is nothing wrong with speaking of Jesus rising from the dead by his own power. That has been the confession of Christian for centuries. Rightly so because it is an important teaching of the Bible.

Why then does the Bible also say **was raised**? Speak of Jesus as having been raise from the dead by the power of another? Why did the apostles such as Peter say *He is the one God raised up by freeing him from the agony of the grave* (Acts 2:24)? Why does the Bible in so many places in the New Testament plainly state the resurrection was not just done by Jesus but also done to Jesus? What statement is God making by raising Jesus from the dead?

**He…was raised to life because of our justification.** Because of the most important term in all of the Bible. The part of the Bible that is the most crucial for us to understand. What statement is God making by raising Jesus from the dead? Justified. Justify is a common and clear Bible term. It is the picture of a judge declaring the verdict “not guilty.” To justify is to declare not guilty, to acquit. It’s a familiar word. We often talk about people justifying their actions. When they do, they’re justifying themselves. They’re saying, “I understand that at first what I did looks like something wrong. I’ll admit that. But here are the reasons why in this circumstance, I have a clear conscience about what I did. You’ll see that I’m not guilty, that I’m justified in my actions.”

Have you ever noticed that people who have justified themselves seem to spend a lot of time doing so in the presence of others? That’s because they aren’t primarily interested in hearing “you’re not guilty” from themselves. What they really want is to hear it from others.

Sometimes they want to hear “not guilty” from a particular person—a friend, a relative. Sometimes it’s actually a judge, even a judge that clearly sees you have done wrong. While you may plead your case and people may believe you acted rightly, you may have every single person nodding along with you and murmuring, “mm-hmm!” none of it means anything unless the judge declares you not guilty, acquitted.

The one we need to justify us—to acquit us, to declare us not guilty—is God. Because you and I have committed crimes against him. I’m not talking about small minor crimes. There is no such things as a minor offense against God. Every sin we commit is a huge offence. Every sin makes us worthy of the death penalty. That’s what God says.

What others tell you doesn’t matter. No matter how much the tell and assure you that you have acted correctly in your given circumstances. You can talk to others and get them to agree with you that the kind of sins you’ve committed aren’t really deserving of eternal death from God. You might be ablet o convince them that what you’ve done isn’t even wrong. They may nod in agreement and declare you not guilty often enough so that you will do the same for them one day in a similar situation. They and they opinions don’t matter. What you can get others to say about you doesn’t really matter.

What matters is what God says about you and what you think, speak, and do. His Word says that many of our actions, our words, and ever our thoughts are sin. They make us guilty before him and deserving of the death penalty. No matter how hard you try to justify yourself and your actions, you can’t undo them and the offence is still there. All your pleading, all your begging, all your promises to try and do better aren’t enough to compel the just judge God to say to you “Not guilty.” He can’t overlook what you have done. “Guilty!”

On the other hand, there’s Jesus. We’ve see Jesus’ life in the gospels and judged it for ourselves to be a perfect life. We’ve declared him not guilty. During this Lenten season we heard both Pontius Pilate and the thief on the cross declare that Jesus had done nothing wrong. Just before Jesus died on the cross, he justified himself by saying, Τετέλεσται *It is Finished. Done. Completed. Terminated. Over. Paid in full.* According to Jesus, he had done every last thing the Father had sent him to do.

Knowing all that, while a resurrection from the dead is still pretty surprising, it should be completely unsurprising to hear that God was making a not guilty declaration through the resurrection. It’s only when you grasp what Jesus had come to do that you’ll understand what God’s justification declaration on Easter really meant.

Jesus said he was sent by God his Father not only to live a perfect life but also to give his life as a ransom for many, for your sins, for my sins, for the sins of the world. Therefore, when Jesus said, *It is Finished—*Done, Completed, Terminated, Over, Paid in full—it meant something to us and for us. It was wonderful to hear the one who speaks before God in our defense saying that his work for us is finished.

 But there was one who still hadn’t rendered a verdict. It was the one whose verdict matters. God the Father Almighty, the judge of all, the one with the power to justify or not justify, the one with the power to declare guilty or not guilty, the one who has the power to punish you for your sins or acquit you. We hadn’t heard him speak yet.

When he raised Jesus to life on Easter, it was him finally speaking. “Jesus was not guilty.” It was God the Father saying, “Jesus, I agree with you, my Son. It is finished. Everything I sent you to do has been finished. Therefore, I declare that what you did is complete. You have completed what you were sent to do. I mark it done. Therefore, I justify you. I declare you not guilty.”

Zero in on the last part with your whole attention. Understand what God says through the empty tomb. God in his word clearly declare that Jesus **was raise to life.** But it doesn’t say that was done to make the statement about Jesus’ being declared not guilty. If that was all that happened that first Easter, we’d be here this morning without anything to celebrate besides that Jesus got what he deserved. We’d be nothing more than death row inmates hearing the news that an innocent man had been found not guilty. “God for him,” we’d say, “but it doesn’t do anything for us.”

Listen closely to what God’s Word says, **He…was raised to life because of our justification. Because of our justification.** Our. Yours. Mine. We were declared not guilty at that empty tomb. When God raised Jesus back to life, he acquitted us. He gave his verdict. Looking right at us he said, “You are not guilty. I see you an innocent, worthy of eternal life in Christ who paid for you.”

Easter isn’t only about Jesus. In fact, it’s also about you. It’s about you being freed from your death sentence. It’s about you being declared not guilty by the one whose judgment matters above all else. It’s about you being justified by God. Happy Easter. Christ is risen! (Pause to see if the people respond) He is risen indeed! Amen.

Points to consider as an individual or with a small group:

* What are two ways to speak of the resurrection and how does each way bring assurance to the Christian?
* Define: justification.
* How does Easter declare justification?

Today with great joy we thank you, Lord, for giving us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Heavenly Father, you have not forsaken us or left us to our own destruction, but kept your ancient promise to send a Savior. We praise you for his perfect life, his innocent death and his glorious resurrection. Because of your faithfulness to your promises, we are rescued from Satan, sin and death.

Savior Jesus, we praise you for carrying out God’s plan to save sinners. Your resurrection stands as the undeniable evidence that you have triumphed over sin, death, hell and the devil. Because of your resurrection, we are confident that we share in the same victory over those enemies.

Holy Spirit, we praise you that through the gospel you have led us to know and believe that Jesus is our risen Savior. Today we say confidently, as did the angel, “He is not here. He has risen.” Preserve us in our certain Christian faith. Continue to lavish on us the blessings of Christ’s resurrection.

Triune God, kindle in our hearts a love for all people. Equip us with both the will and the words to tell others that Jesus has indeed risen from the grave. Use us to share the message of the empty tomb, so that others too may have life from Christ.

Lord of life, comfort us in every hardship with the good news of the resurrection. Encourage all who stand at death’s door. Bring peace to all who mourn the loss of a loved one who has died in faith in the risen Savior. Strengthen each of us with the assurance that because Jesus lives, we too will live. Remind us all that the death of a Christian is not a defeat. Because of Jesus we will live forever.

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you for the gifts of our Savior’s body and blood in the sacrament. We praise you for the wealth of spiritual blessings that come to us as we receive his sacred meal. Turn our hearts to you in repentance and faith. Lead us to believe our Savior’s plain words about the sacrament. Increase our love for you and for one another, and after this life allow us a place at your heavenly table. We thank you, heavenly Father, for raising Christ from the dead. Because he lives, we live now, and will live eternally. Amen.