

Romans 4:18-25

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[0 : 0 0] This morning we were reflecting on the resurrection as a historical event as we retraced the steps of Mary Magdalene on that first Easter morning.

And that historical perspective is important as we insist that the resurrection of Jesus really happened.

And so returning to the gospel accounts that present this event in this way as something that really happened is always important and always important for us to be clear and indeed insistent on the historicity of the resurrection.

Indeed our faith stands or falls on the historicity of the resurrection. We're reminded of the words of Paul as he wrote to the believers in Corinth in 1 Corinthians chapter 15.

If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile. And then just a couple of verses on he goes on to say, in the event that Christ has not been raised, we are to be pitied more than all men.

[1 : 2 3] And so we do spend time on and focus on the historicity of the resurrection. But as well as focusing on and insisting on its historicity, we do also need to reflect on the significance of the resurrection.

What does it mean that Jesus rose from the dead? What has his resurrection secured for us as believers? And I want to spend a little time in that regard this evening.

And our text in Romans chapter 4 and verse 25 captures in a few choice words the heart of the matter with respect to the significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

One writer quaintly speaks of how in this verse we have distilled the very sum of saving knowledge.

Now it sounds somewhat old-fashioned language, but I think it does capture helpfully what we find in these few words in this one verse.

[2 : 2 9] He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. In those few words distilled the very sum of saving knowledge.

Now this verse, this one verse that we're going to be focusing on, clearly doesn't tell us all that there is to know, or indeed all that we need to know, but it does provide us with the heart of the matter.

Now in our text, Paul considers both the death and resurrection of Jesus and attributes to each a distinct significance or purpose.

Let's just read the verse again, but with that in mind, that you have these two events, the death and the resurrection, and to each Paul attributes a particular significance.

He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. Two parallel clauses, identical in their grammatical construction, where one event, the death, is identified as dealing with one matter or securing one end, and the other event, the resurrection, identified as securing another benefit for us.

[3 : 46] So that's the structure of this little verse. And we'll respect Paul's arrangement and look at each distinctly, but we do so with the caveat that both the death and resurrection are so indissolubly connected in God's plan of salvation that both purposes, even the two purposes identified here, atonement for sin and justification, both are to be understood as the consequence of both the death and the resurrection of Jesus.

So though Paul distinguishes for the purposes he has in this verse, that's not to say that the two aren't indissolubly linked. And when we speak of our atonement, when we speak of justification, we can't neatly or artificially say that it's only because of one or two of these events that are mentioned in the verse.

So that's just to kind of clarify that. So you have these two clauses, the two statements in this verse. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

And let's think of each in turn. We'll start in the order that Paul writes the verse. He was delivered over to death for our sins. And I want to consider this clause of the verse, this statement under three headings.

And we won't be dwelling much on each of them, but just for the purposes of structure, we're going to identify three headings that we'll use to help us. First of all, I want to comment on the horror of it, this statement that Paul makes, the horror of it.

[5 : 27] But then also comment on the wonder of it and then focus in on what is Paul's particular concern, and that is the purpose of it, the purpose of what he is saying, or rather the purpose of this fact of Jesus being delivered over to death.

What purpose is it intended to secure? So first of all, the horror of it. Jesus then, we're told, was delivered over to death.

Now, there's a horror to this even before we consider the unidentified subject of the verb, at least unidentified in this one verse that we're focusing in on, almost ignoring the context.

Just the very fact that it would be said that Jesus was delivered over to death, that alone is a horrific thing. But the horror of what Paul is declaring is intensified to the nth degree when we appreciate who delivered Jesus over to death.

Who is the subject of the verb? Who is the one who delivered over to death our Savior? And in the light of what the Bible teaches, in many places, somebody, in some occasions very explicitly, the only answer we can come to is that he was delivered over by his Father.

[6 : 49] He was delivered to death by God. The very language of this verse echoes the language of Isaiah 53, where we have the same verb, the same picture being described, the same reality presented by the prophet.

In Isaiah chapter 53, if we just notice on a couple of occasions in this chapter, in verse 6 we read, we all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

There very clearly, it is God who is delivering up the Messiah to this fate. And in other occasions here in this chapter, you have the same picture, the same reality being described.

Just as a, almost as a curious aside, when we speak of Jesus being delivered over to death by the Father, the same verb that you have here in verse 25 is also found in the passage in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, where you have described the institution of the Lord's Supper.

And so the language of that passage is very familiar to us because we read it every time. We celebrate the Lord's Supper. And you remember the verse as it goes, on the night that he was betrayed, Jesus took bread, and so it goes on.

[8 : 23] It's interesting that the verb there just translated, betrayed, is the same verb that is found here in verse 25. He was delivered over. And an argument can be made.

There's no doubt that the translators almost unanimously feel that the appropriate verb is betrayed. But an argument can be made for saying on the night that he was delivered.

And if that is what is being said, or if we take it in that sense, then it changes significantly what that verse is saying. And it's attributing, as here, this reality of Jesus being handed over to death as an act of his own Father.

Well, we don't need to come to a view on how we are to understand the verse in Corinthians. But here, in our text, very clearly, God is the subject of the verb.

He is the one who delivers over his Son. Having said that, it is only right to stress that though it is the Father who delivers his Son over to death, Jesus is not a passive, much less reluctant victim of this action on the part of the Father.

[9 : 43] There are different occasions in the Bible where the language used and Jesus presents Jesus as being very much active in making his way to Calvary and to his own death.

To give just one example, in Galatians chapter 2 and in verse 20, Paul expresses himself in this way, I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.

The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. And so there it's speaking of Jesus and it speaks of Jesus giving himself for us.

And so it is the Father who delivers him over to death, but Jesus, as I say, is not in any way to be understood as being passive, much less reluctant in the action of his Father.

But what was Jesus delivered over to? Well, he was delivered over to his enemies. He was delivered over to humiliation and torture. He was delivered over to abandonment and shame.

[10 : 48] He was delivered over to death and death on a cross. He was delivered over to the grave. And can we even begin to imagine the pain in the Father's heart as he delivered his only Son to such a fate?

And the answer to that question is no. We can't imagine the pain in the Father's heart. And so I begin by just noting this, that the horror of it, he was delivered over to death for our sins.

But alongside the horror of it, and it seems almost incongruous that alongside the horror of it, we can also speak of the wonder of it. What can explain such horror?

Why did the Father deliver over his Son to such an unspeakable fate? Well, we have the answer in the best-known verse in the Bible, perhaps. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.

For God so loved the world, if we can paraphrase, that he delivered over to death his only Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

[11 : 55] The Father delivered over his Son to death, driven by his great love for you and me. So the horror of it, the wonder of it, but thirdly, as we think of this first clause, the purpose of it.

And Paul tells us that Jesus was delivered over to death for our sins. The preposition translated for there, delivered over to death for our sins, has a sense of on account of or with a view to and silent but implicit with a view to dealing with our sins.

He was delivered over to death with a view to dealing with our sin. And note that the purpose is to deal with our sin. And who are the our that Paul is referring to?

Well, he's referring to all believers of whom he is one. Jesus was delivered over for our sins, for your sin and for my sin. But what was achieved with respect to our sin by the death of Jesus?

Well, that's a big question. But let me just say two things. Jesus, by his death, bore God's righteous anger towards sin. As we've already sung this evening in the first hymn that we sung.

[13 : 12] Jesus, by his death, bore God's righteous anger. But also, and these two things are very much connected, Jesus, by his death, endured our just punishment for sin.

And by satisfying God's righteous anger and by bearing our just punishment, Jesus dealt with our sin and so secured our forgiveness.

The price of forgiveness has been paid. Hence, we see or we can comment on the purpose of it. He was delivered over to death for our sins.

Well, that's the first clause. But then you have the second clause, which in a way is of particular interest to us on this Easter Sunday. Paul goes on to say, and was raised to life for our justification.

And this statement of Paul, I also want to consider under three headings. The joy of it, the wonder of it, and the purpose of it. So, two of the headings are the same as the previous one, but the first is really in contrast to the previous one.

[14 : 17] The joy of it, the wonder of it, and the purpose of it. First of all then, the joy of it. And as I say, this is in contrast to the horror of what Paul states in the first clause of the verse.

The horror of the Father delivering over his Son to death. And the unidentified subject, of course, is the same. It is the same subject who delivers over, who raises up again.

It is God the Father who delivered his Son, and it is God the Father who raised to life again his Son. And so we speak of the joy of it.

And again, we maybe engage in speculation that is beyond what is legitimate for us to even engage in, but can we imagine, can we begin to imagine the joy of the Father on Easter morning at the appointed time to raise his Son from the grave, the one who had delivered him over to death, and now the time has come for him to raise up his Son again, the joy of it all.

The Father raised his Son in an act of glorious vindication, declaring to the cosmos that redemption had been secured, that the mission had been completed, and had been completed fully and wholly and successfully.

[15 : 42] And so he raises up his Son in glorious vindication, the joy of it, but also the wonder of it. Now I don't want to dwell on this as we reflected this morning on the fact of the resurrection, but let us never become so familiar with the facts as to lose the sense of awestruck wonder.

The man who was dead and buried is now alive and kicking the wonder of it. But then let's move on to the third heading here as we think of this second clause and spend a little bit longer on this, and that is the purpose of it.

Paul here says that Jesus was raised to life for our justification. Now this is a little bit more difficult to understand than the first clause.

He was delivered over to death for our sins. I think even with a fairly basic knowledge of the gospel story, we're familiar with that concept or with that reality of Jesus dying for our sins.

It's the ABC of the gospel. We recognize that. But this second clause is maybe less easy for us to get a handle on. What does Paul mean when he says that Jesus was raised to life for our justification?

[17 : 10] Maybe as a prior point, we do need to just comment on the meaning of this word justification before trying to establish the connection of justification with the resurrection.

And the context of this verse that we've largely ignored, but that we'll turn to just for a moment now, the context of this verse is the example of Abraham and the manner in which the patriarch Abraham was justified by God.

And verse 22, just a couple of verses before our text, tells us what is involved in being justified. There we read, this is why it was credited to him, to Abraham, as righteousness.

And how did that work? How did that outcome come about? Well, because Abraham believed God. He believed the promise that God had made.

Here in the passage, the promise that has been spoken of is the promise of a son, the promise of descendants. And everything seemed to suggest that that was impossible, but Abraham believed.

[18 : 19] And that belief, that faith, was credited to him as righteousness. Abraham, though unrighteous, a sinner just like us, was reckoned, was deemed, was considered righteous by God through faith.

And that is what it means to be justified, to be declared righteous by God. But in what sense is our justification secured by the resurrection, as Paul seems to be stating here in our text?

Now, there are maybe a number of possible answers to that question, but I think we can narrow it down to two key senses in which justification is secured by the resurrection.

And the first is this, and this first answer, this first sense, we'll see how really the death and resurrection are so intertwined. The resurrection served as the confirmation of the efficacy of Christ's death.

And we simply can't consider the resurrection in isolation. In this sense, our justification secured by the blood or the death of Christ, which is what Paul states just a few verses on in chapter 5 and verse 9, notice what Paul says there.

[19 : 40] It's just, it's almost, before he's had time to pause for breath from what he said in verse 25, that Jesus was raised to life for our justification, what is he going on to say in verse 9 of chapter 5?

Since we have now been justified by his blood, justified by his death. So, in one verse he's saying where Jesus was raised to life for our justification, and the connection he's making is between the resurrection and justification, and yet a few verses on he's saying we're justified by his blood.

So, how do we, how do we bring the two together? Well, I think this is the way we can bring the two together. The resurrection serves to confirm that the death has secured the objective sought, that in the death of Christ our sins have been dealt with, and so the opportunity is provided, the possibility of justification has been secured by his death.

So, in that sense, we can connect justification with the resurrection, the resurrection serving as a confirmation of what Jesus' death secured.

But I think there's a second sense in which our justification is secured by or connected to the resurrection, and it's simply this, and in some ways it's a very simple thing and yet an important thing.

[21 : 06] And it is this, that for our justification it's necessary that Jesus be alive. We need a living Christ to apply to us the merits of his death.

His death secures for us innumerable benefits including justification, but Jesus has a continuing work in applying the benefits of his death to us, and he can only do that if he's alive.

It's necessary for him to be alive to serve us in that way. The resurrection provides us with a living Christ who having resurrected from the grave, having been raised again, then in due course ascended on high and is seated at the right hand of the Father, interceding for us, applying to us the merits of his death.

And so, in what sense is our justification secured by the resurrection? Well, in the sense that the resurrection confirms what Jesus secured by his death, but also by providing us with a living Christ, a living high priest who can apply all the merits of his finished work to us.

We can maybe, in kind of illustrating this, draw a parallel with the Old Testament sacrificial system as a way of, as I say, illustrating the point. And I'm just reading from a commentary by a good worthy who's written a commentary on Romans, Charles Hodge.

[22 : 39] And he expresses himself in this way, and I'll just read a paragraph of what he says. As it was necessary that the high priest should not only slay the victim at the altar, but carry the blood into the most holy place and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat, so it was necessary not only that our great high priest should suffer in the outer court, but that he should pass into heaven to present his righteousness before God for our justification.

So you see the parallel that the Hodge is drawing. He's saying in the Old Testament in the temple, the animal, the sacrificial animal was killed, but not only was the animal killed, but then that blood was taken to the most holy place and sprinkled on the mercy seat.

And he's drawing a parallel there with Jesus died on the cross, but it wasn't sufficient or it couldn't just remain there. It was necessary for him then to be resurrected from the grave that he would ascend into heaven and present before the Father his righteousness, the merits of his finished work.

That's the parallel that he's drawing, and I think it's a legitimate parallel. We need a living, resurrected Christ to apply the benefits of his death, among them, justification to us.

to draw things to a close. How are we to respond in the light of these truths? What do you need to do? Well, in one sense, you have nothing to do for God has done everything.

[24 : 12] He is the subject of the verb, of both verbs, in verse 25. He is the one who delivered over to death his son for our sins. He did that. He's done it.

He's the one who rose him again from the dead for our justification. It's all been done. God has done it all together with his son. And so to him be the glory and the honor and the praise.

But of course, there is something that we all need to do, and that is we need to believe, which is the whole thrust of this passage, presenting Abraham as an example, presenting Abraham as the model believer in that sense.

He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. And we need to believe the same God that Abraham believed. Our faith is directed to God himself.

Indeed, in verse 23, that's made very clear. The words, it was credited to him, were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness, for us who believe in him who raised Jesus, our Lord, from the dead.

[25 : 21] We have to believe in him. We have to believe in God, the God who has done these things. that the object of our faith is God himself, the God who handed over his son to death, the God who raised him up again from the grave.

And as we believe in God, in the God who has done these things, so that belief serves as the means by which we are credited with his righteousness.

we need to believe. Well, this is the heart of the gospel in these brief words that conclude this chapter in Paul's letter to the Romans.

He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word.

We thank you for the finished work of your son. But we thank you also that he has a continuing work in applying to us the benefits of his work at Calvary.

[26 : 27] We thank you that even as we pray now, we are praying in the name of Jesus. We are praying in the assurance that he is seated at your right hand, interceding for us.

We thank you that the resurrection provides us with a living Christ, an active Christ, a working Christ, a Christ who continues to bless and to apply to us all the manifold merits and blessings of his work on our behalf.

And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.