

The way that we talk about justification sometimes can seem kind of cold and impersonal and distant. When we say things like "everybody's justified in the same way, regardless of who they are," that can seem kind of impersonal. Like receiving a form letter. You get a card from a company saying "Happy birthday," but it's been printed, and you know that they didn't sign it themselves. It just doesn't mean the same, because it's a form kind of thing. Everybody gets one. Or we think of justification as God our judge saying that we are now innocent. But when was the last time you heard about a judge who went out to celebrate with the accused after the trial? To have drinks or something like that. If anything, the judge will probably never see them again the rest of their lives. Or when two people forgive each other. Sure, they're reconciled to each other, but there might still be some hard feelings, and they can't quite look at each other the same way. It's kind of a formality, kind of perfunctory in a way. And unfortunately we can treat justification by faith in the same way, Christians: as something cold and impersonal and distant. Something that's for everyone, but is it really for me?

But Christians, being justified by faith is so much more than that. Because being justified by faith means that we are now God's friends. He is not distant from us. He is not cold towards us. We are his friends, and we have peace with him. We are no longer his enemies. And this peace which we have comes through Jesus Christ, his Son. That is what justification by faith is all about.

But what exactly does this peace mean for us? Paul tells us that we now have access and hope because of Jesus. And that word "access" in verse 2 of our reading is a very important one. We don't want to take it for granted. We don't want to just pass by it either. If we gain access to something, it means that we are now able to go where we were not able to go before. If we gain access to new information, it means that we are allowed to go there when before we couldn't. And Christians, before this, we were not able to go to God. God was separated from us. God was off limits because of our sin. And there was no way that we were going to get around it. But now because of Jesus, we do have access. We do have access to the Father. We can come to him. And this is an unlimited access, too. It's not like we have to take turns or wait in line or make an appointment to go to God. No, we can go to him whenever we need to, wherever we are, and he has promised to hear us. What a glorious privilege that is, Christians! To be able to go to our God and Father, all because we have been justified by faith in Jesus Christ.

Do you see what kind of peace this access gives to us, Christians? Whenever we are in trouble, whenever we are suffering anything, the Lord of all things listens to us. And I know we might be worried about those who work behind-the-scenes, who are pulling the strings changing things. But we don't need to worry about them, because we have access to one far greater than all of these things. We can take all of our problems--personal, society, whatever they may be--before the one who can actually do something about it. We have a friend, a friend far greater than anything, who can do something about all of our troubles. So Christians, why would we hesitate to come before God in prayer? Think about it. The God who commands everything, the God who set the stars on fire, the God who sets the earth in its place, the God who commands the wind and the waves and causes it to rain, this same God has promised to hear you. This same God is your friend and Father, and he will take care of you in all things. No matter how small it may seem to be, no matter how big the problem is that we're dealing with, we can go to God, and he will do something about it. How wonderful that is! To know that we have a friend like that. And

knowing that, we indeed have a peace that surpasses all understanding. So as the hymn tells us, take it to the Lord in prayer!

More than this, Christians, being justified by faith means that we also have hope through Jesus. As Paul tells us, we can actually rejoice in the midst of our sufferings. That's what he says in verse 3. Now, that might sound strange to us, and we'd say: "How can that be? Who possibly rejoices in what they're struggling with? Who could possibly rejoice in their problems?" But we can, Christians, because through such things as Christians, we have hope. Because suffering, Paul tells us, produces endurance. You could also translate that as "produces patience." Because when we are suffering, we can see how God is at work. We can see how he is taking care of us every step of the way. And that causes us to be patient. It teaches us patience, because we know that God will help us time and time again. And this patience produces character, not the kind of character that we sometimes talk about with our kids, but the character that is something proven, something tested, something reliable. Because through our suffering, Christians, seeing how God helps us every step of the way, we learn to rely on him. And the more we learn to rely on him, the more we can look through these things and be formed in him to know that he's going to care for us through everything. Not just in the moment, but also in times to come. And this character then produces hope, because it leads us to look towards God. To not look at the what we're going through right now, but to look to the one who can and will do something about it. That is why we have hope, Christians, because our suffering teaches us that God will care for us because he is our friend and Father.

Do you see what kind of peace that gives to us, then, Christians? This hope. All the things that we are going through right now, whatever the situation may be, no matter how terrible it seems, it will all come to an end. It will all pass away. The pains of life and the situations we find ourselves in do not go on forever. And we can look to God through all of them, knowing that he is going to do something about them, either now or in the time to come. That's why we have hope. That's why we have peace. The world doesn't know this kind of peace. The world can't look through these things. You can see it in the way that they react to tragedies. They can only be angry. They can only hope that maybe, maybe something will change in the future, but they have nothing solid to hold on to. Nothing to give them real hope in the midst of their troubles. But we have hope, Christians. We have something to look forward to. Because we know that through Jesus, all things will be made right. And those who have brought pain into this world will be judged, and those who have suffered in the Church will find peace, a peace beyond all understanding in Jesus Christ our Lord. What peace we have, knowing that! Knowing that we are God's friends, and God always takes care of his friends.

But how do we know it for sure? we might ask. How can we be certain that we have this peace? How can we be certain that we are indeed God's friends? Paul tells us, verse 6: "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly." And he tells us in verse 8, just a little bit later, that that means that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. But think about that, Christians. While we were still sinners, that's when Jesus died for our sins. While we were still his enemies, Christ gave himself for us. Not afterwards, as if we were his friends and then he died for us. No. While we were still his enemies. Because we could understand someone dying for a good person, right? This is what Paul means when he says in verse 7: "For one will scarcely die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person, one would dare even to die." We

understand sacrificing ourselves for somebody else. We understand the hero who lays down his life in order to save someone he's never met before. We get that. We understand a soldier giving up his life for the sake of his fellow soldiers. We get that too. We get someone dying for someone good. But what we don't understand is dying for someone evil, dying for someone who is an enemy. Who ever heard of someone who gave their lives so the bad guy could escape? But that's exactly what Jesus has done. While we were still his enemies, Christ died for us. Jesus died to make his enemies his friends. And now that he has made us his friends through his death, how much more will he do all of these things, now that we are alive in him? If Jesus did so much for us to make us who we are today, he's not going to stop. And we can rely on him, knowing that he's going to do so much more for us, now that we are friends with God.

Christians, what peace that gives to us, knowing that we are friends with God! We can face all these things, because Jesus has died for us. We can endure all things, knowing that Jesus is alive. And no matter what we have to go through, we have peace with God, because we are now his friends. No longer his enemies. No longer kept away from. And being justified by faith in Jesus Christ means that we have this peace. It means that God is our friend and Father forever.

So Christians, justification by faith is not a cold, impersonal, distant thing, something for everyone and no one at the same time. Being justified by faith means that we are the friends of God. And knowing that, we don't have to worry about anything that happens in this world, because our heavenly Friend has all things in his mighty hand. Jesus died to make us his friends, and that is true forever.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have given us your Son, Jesus Christ, to make us your friends. We pray that you would help us always to trust in you, knowing that we have peace and hope in the midst of all things. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.