

I read a couple of headlines in this past week about the chapter we are about to explore today, Chapter 8. One person said that if you were deserted on an island, and had nothing else, then Romans 8 is the only thing that you need, it is truly a lifeline. I also read someone else say, that if scripture was a golden ring, then the Book of Romans would be the diamond on that golden ring. And Romans chapter 8 would be the sparkle on the diamond of that golden ring. It really is that special, and I hope today as we explore it a little, that all of you come to love it in the same way. And I realise that Romans 8 is a sermon series – we could literally spend weeks on this one chapter, no problem. But don't worry I'm not going to do that.

So as we begin to look at this, can I ask that we pray :

You know this morning I have to state that being a Christian is the greatest privilege in all the world. I was listening on Friday to the statistics in Northern Ireland Healthcare of having now performed 3,000 kidney transplants. You might have seen on the news, that Shannon Stewart from Belfast received a live kidney donation from her mum, Joanne Osborne on 3rd January at Belfast City Hospital. After her operation, Shannon commented about her mum – “What she has done for me and my family is unreal, and you can never repay her for that. I just love her dearly; she is everything and more to me”. Shannon had realised just how much her mother's sacrifice had been to her. She could have life again.

And for me, when I think of Jesus, I think not just the same, but even more. I am so blessed that through what Christ has done, I don't just have a new kidney, I have an everlasting life before me. It's so incredible and I am so deeply thankful to God for that sacrifice that Jesus made for me.

If you are a Christian this morning, do you know how blessed you truly are? And the reason why I begin there is because of this – the world doesn't agree with what I have just said. The world thinks that Christianity is the source of many problems, it believes that it will completely mess up your life, and that it will restrict your freedom. And that's so not the case. And Romans 8 will show us how incredible the Christian life is. Since Christmas I have been getting Physio for my shoulder following my procedure, and I have so much more strength now in my shoulder. That is the same with Romans 8 – it gives you so much strength in your faith, and strength for how much God loves you.

Today I'm going to look at one privilege that comes from these verses – there's so many more, but I'm only going to look at one, so that as we go from here my prayer is that we can live out in the world confident of believing in what we profess. And if today you don't have a living relationship with Jesus, then I hope that this chapter will demonstrate for you the privileges there are and you will want to be a Christian.

So today we are going to look at the issue of 'justification'. A Christian is someone who is justified. So, what does that mean, and how do we live a justified life?

Well, what it means is that if Christ is in your life, then you are not guilty. Look at the first verse of our reading – *'Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus'*. If you have ever seen a court case, you will know that being condemned means that the person in the dock has a judgment against them. If found guilty, then judgment is handed down.

In life, every one of us has a judgment against us, for things that we have done that have hurt others, or for things that we haven't done and neglected others. There's no way out of that. And we call that sin. It's not just about doing wrong things, because we can all maybe say that we are generally good people. No, it's deeper than that. It's being focused more on ourselves, rather than thinking of others or God. So, we are all guilty before God. It leads us to do things that we shouldn't. Now, we can all say but I'm a good person, and that is the case, but before a Holy God all of us have sinned and fallen short of his perfect glory – we cannot avoid that. Paul in chapter 7 uses those familiar words about *'I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing'*. That's the struggle that all of us at different stages of our lives deals with.

Now in life there are two types of people when it comes to sin – those who really don't care, and then those who feel the guilt of doing something that hurts another. I wonder are you like me, where you wrestle with doubts and fears. For example, fearing the worst – what if my past secrets catch up on me? Or what about not feeling good enough or forgiven? I must try harder to make up for it... If that's you, remember what Chapter 8 says, verse 3, '*[God sent] his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering*'. Did you hear that? – he took our guilt and shame. He was condemned. And the amazing news in Romans 8 is that if you are in Christ Jesus, then there's no condemnation on you. And noticed that Paul says there is NOW no condemnation. That's because Jesus was condemned (that's the past), and so NOW there's no condemnation for us (that's the present). In light of the cross (the past), God cannot and will not condemn those who are in Christ Jesus (that's the present). Is that not amazing? It's not about our good works. It's all about Christ. You are not guilty if you are in Christ – he has paid the price for you.

And so being a Christian also means that you are righteous before God - you are accepted by God, It's as if you have lived a blameless life – although you haven't – he declares that you are righteous.

So that's great, but how then is it possible that you are justified? How can God justify and see us as righteous if we are sinful? If a righteous and just judge condemns the wicked, how can he justify sinful people? Well, it's because of Jesus. Verse 3 says "*For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh,^[b] God did by sending his own Son*". You see it's not about stuff that we do. The law is good and important, but because of our sin we cannot keep the law – you can't make yourself right with God because we can't remain perfect. So it's all about God sending his son in our place. It's not about us doing something to make ourselves righteous, but it's all about a relationship with Jesus which can give you his righteousness and that is then counted to you by God as if you have lived a perfect life.

So therefore, a Christian's righteousness is passive. What do I mean by that? It's not something that you do yourself. It's something that is given to you. It's not dependent on what you do and your works, it's dependent of Jesus and his works. Even your best things are tainted with sin, and therefore cannot get rid of your massive debt. When Jesus went to the cross, he took all our debt with him. He was punished on our behalf so that we can get his righteousness. And you get that by putting your trust in Jesus Christ. You don't get it by coming week after week to church, even though that is really important to build the body of Christ, it must start with a personal commitment to follow Jesus.

You would be amazed at the number of conversations I have with people in different denominations who will tell me about all the things that such and such has done for the Church, and that if you cut them across the middle, just like a big bar of rock, it would say Church of Ireland, or Presbyterian etc through that person. But we've got to get into our minds that none of that will make any difference if the foundation of our faith is not built upon Christ alone. If you have put your trust in Jesus Christ alone then you are righteous and justified in the sight of God. So, the obvious question this morning is this – have you truly put your trust in Jesus Christ and what he has done for you on that cross? Do you know what it is to be accepted by God, even though you mess up? Do you know what it is to be righteous?

Now if you do know, then can I encourage you to live that which reflects being righteous and justified before God.

Because in Verses 5-8 Paul tells us that there are 2 ways to live. The first way is to live according to the flesh and second way is to live according to the spirit. The first way leads to death Paul says in verse 6. The second way leads to true life and peace. So what does it mean to live by the flesh? Obviously, Paul is not talking here about our physical bodies. Rather, the flesh is that part of you and me that wants to live for yourself. It means that you don't see a need to have a saviour. Isn't that what our world is like today – "no one's going to tell me how to live my life – that's my choice". But living by the flesh may not be about disobedience – it could mean that you keep all the rules, you're generally a good person. But both ways are just as bad because you reckon that you don't need a saviour. But the problem with this is that the result is death. You get to the end of your life, and in

your eulogy the minister talks about all the things you did in your life, but there's no reference to what Jesus has done in you. That folks is a life that doesn't need a saviour and it will end.

But if you live according to the spirit, Paul says in verse 5 that one sets their minds according to the things of the spirit. The NLT translation says it like this - "*those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit*". Paul is saying the way you live, is dependent on the way you think. If you go through each day understanding that the Spirit of God is in you, then it determines how you live. Ultimately our thoughts govern our actions, so if you set your mind on the spirit you will have life and peace. But how do you do that? What does it mean to set your mind on the spirit? Well Paul says to remember who you are. Look at verse 9. "*You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you*". So let's be clear today, in every one of us who has accepted the Lord Jesus as their saviour, scripture says that the Holy Spirit dwells within you. That should therefore determine how you live each day. So that becomes our ultimate aim, to live as the Spirit desires within you. Remember who you are.

And if you remember who you are in Christ, then that means 3 things which I'd like to end with.

Now as we are dealing with the magnificence of this incredible chapter in Romans, then I think it's very appropriate that I begin with an incredible quote from a famous philosopher – are you ready?

- This philosopher said these words - "The past is in the past". That might not seem very deep. So let me give you the full quote "I'm never going back. The past is in the past". So who was it that said it? Well, it was actually Elsa out of the kids' movie Frozen. But it's so true folks. Living a justified life, we have got to remember that the past is in the past. So often we live as we do because we feel so guilty about stuff we've done in the past. And we can become stuck living our lives, based upon what has happened to us. For me, I can remember that I was so nervous about marrying Alison, and I said to her that I wasn't sure about going ahead with it, because I didn't want to be a husband to her like the way my father had been to my mum. I wasn't for progressing with my own life, because I had allowed my past to continue to affect my present. A bit like Elsa, I had to let it go (don't worry I'm not going to sing at this point). But the past is very much in the past. Jesus Christ on the cross paid for those sins, and you are now righteous before God. Let the past be in the past. Do not talk about it, unless it is to demonstrate how you are now free from that.
- So secondly, remember that there is nothing you can now do to make God love you more, and there's nothing you can do to make God love you any less. Now all of us know that life has its good days and bad days. A good day for me would be to get up early, be ahead of everyone, get my bible reading done and to pray. And everything is going well. I'm being complimented by people throughout the day. Everything is great. There's no disputes at home. I get into bed that night feeling I've accomplished all I needed to do and I sleep soundly. And then there's the other day, where you get up late, the shower isn't that warm. It's bucketing down outside, and you get soaked before you get into work. Then you lose your temper, maybe a swear word comes out and someone tackles you in the office because they say you're meant to be a Christian, then you get home to find the dog has ate the cushion in the living room. You get into bed, worn out, having had a row with your partner. And as you fall asleep you feel the guilt of not having done any bible reading that day. So you conclude that you have failed God.

But folks, living a justified life and being made righteous before God, shouldn't make you think that way. Having a good day doesn't make you more righteous before God, it doesn't make you better before God. Nor if you've had a bad day, does it mean that God is suddenly annoyed with you because you haven't hit the mark that day, or that your righteousness is less. Remember that God accepts you on your good days and your bad days. He declares you to be righteous in the sight of Jesus, and verse 14 declares "*For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God*". If you are in Christ, then you are a child of his, you have received an incredible inheritance, that spirit in you Paul says doesn't make you a slave to the law of having to do this or that in order to receive more approval. You're his. You are

justified and righteous in his sight. Stop trying.

- So let the past be in the past. Stop trying to gain more favour from God. And then thirdly, remember that you can change. It is possible to live as a Christian but feel so full of despair, and say 'I can't change'. I'm a mess. I'm an alcoholic, I'm controlled too much by anxiety, I can't get rid of this addiction to porn. I just can't live any differently – I've tried. It's too hard to change, and you feel that despair. But if you are a Christian remember that you have the Holy Spirit living in you. And the Holy Spirit gives power and life to your spirit. Do you know how powerful that it? Well look at verse 11, "*And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of^[a] his Spirit who lives in you*". The Holy Spirit has power over death, so if he has that power and he is living in you, then he has the power to help you overcome the issues that you are dealing with today. The person of the Holy Spirit will point you to Jesus Christ, to show you his love for you, to show you that you are so full of sin that he had to die on that cross for you so that the power of any sin, any addiction, any despair will not overcome you to the grave, but you are declared righteous and accepted by him simply by placing your trust in him as your saviour. The Holy Spirit helps you fix your mind more on that, so that it enables you to change. You can say no to ways that will make you think more about your own efforts, and point you towards Jesus who is God and you centre your life on him each and every day. And that your life becomes more affected by him than your own doings. That power of the Holy Spirit can and will transform your life, whoever you are and whatever you have done.

Folks, that lady who received that Kidney transplant feels so incredibly blessed. How much more should we if we have Christ in us. Remember today that if you have Christ in your life, then there is no condemnation for you. Remember that the Spirit that you have received has brought about your adoption. You're not a slave to this world. So go in the power that you have dwelling in you today.

And if today you do not have Christ in your life, then I pray by the power of the Holy Spirit that he would convict your heart today to come to Jesus - do something about it today before it's too late. "*There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you^[a] free from the law of sin and death*".