

# What 3 Words: Justification

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, have you heard of What Three Words? What Three Words? What Three Words is a website that you can use to tell people where to find you.

So they've basically carved up the whole surface of the earth into three meter squares, and they've given three words to each square. So say you were meeting someone here, you've invited someone along, and you've come in, to the church, and you're saving them a seat, okay, you could tell them, tilt inch forum, if you were sitting here, and they would know where to come and find you. Or if you're sitting over there, you would tell them, caring fence leaves. Okay, you probably don't need that for inviting people to church, it's not that complicated, is it?

But that's the idea, if you were lost in the North Sea somewhere, or you were lost in the hills, okay, you could tell people three words, they could punch it into this website, and locate you exactly where you are within a three meter square.

Now those three words are completely random, okay, there's no significance to them, the place where they are. They're not just where they are, but the Bible gives us three specific words that tell us where we stand.

[ 1 : 30 ] Three words that locate us in life. And it would seem important, therefore, for us to know what those words are. What three words?

What three words? And now as a church, we use a catechism. In our house, we just call it the question book. It's a book of questions and answers. Ours even has pictures.

And it helps us get a handle on what the Bible teaches. And there's a question in that book that goes like this. What benefits do those who are effectually called partake of in this life?

Basically, okay, how do we as Christians benefit from trusting in Christ right now? Not in the future in heaven, that's a different question.

But right now in the present, what do I gain by putting my trust in Christ? And the catechism picks out three things.

[ 2 : 34 ] There are others, it says, but they all kind of flow out of these three big things. Three words that define where we are now as Christians. And I wonder if you could guess what three words, what do you think?

There was a giveaway in the series graphic in the sermon title as well. They're all longish words. They're theological words, but they're biblical words. The catechism says if you're a Christian, then the three words that tell you where you stand right now are justification, adoption, and sanctification. Three words that tell you where you stand in Christ. Justification, adoption, sanctification. If you're feeling lost in life, here are three words that can bring you back onto solid ground.

Or if someone wants to know what's changed now that you're a Christian, well, here are three words to help you unpack it for them. Here's where I was, and this is where I am now.

Now, the problem is, if those words are meant to help us so much, most of us are probably like, great, thanks. What does that mean? What do those words, some of you have probably never heard some of those words.

[ 3 : 58 ] Most of us are probably thinking, I wouldn't even know where to begin if someone said, what is that about? And so, we're just going to take three Sunday mornings to walk through them together as a church family, to see them in our Bibles, and then to press in to how these realities change or shape our experience of life in our day to day.

What do these words mean, and how do they change us? And so, this morning, we're just focusing on the first one, justification. That's why we're in Romans, and our readings tell us that the moment we put our trust in Jesus, God declares us righteous in His sight.

That is, He justifies us. At the start of that reading in chapter 3, verse 9, it sums up Paul's argument so far in this letter, and it helps us see why that's such good news.

Just have a look again with me, chapter 3 and verse 9. What then? He says, are Jews any better off? No, not at all.

For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin. As it is written, no one is righteous.

[ 5 : 22 ] So, Paul, who wrote this letter, he's rounding us his first big point in the letter, saying every single person has the same problem, and it's this.

We are not right. Now, straight away, that puts us on the back foot, because we like to be able to say about ourselves, don't we?

We're okay, really? You know, I know I'm not perfect, but I try my best. I have the right kind of views on things.

I support the right causes. I don't hurt or offend anyone, or if I do, it was probably their fault anyway. But I'm basically a good person. But Paul turns that whole idea of what's a right way to live on its head.

He said in chapter 1, the way we know we're not righteous is that we suppress or cover up the truth about God. Right?

[ 6 : 23 ] We say, our world says it makes more sense to think that the order and the beauty of the created world and the universe, you probably, that's all down to chance. Not a creator God.

Not a creator God, which is easier to believe, but we cover it up. We say there is no God, and then we live like it. We close our eyes, says Paul, and then we choose to stumble around in the dark.

And that's not right. But before the Christians here think, well, we're okay then. We believe in God. We worship. But what Paul says in chapter 2, no, you who know God, well, you're no better.

In fact, in some ways, you're worse because you know that there's a God, and yet you spend your time living as if there wasn't. You know what his word says, but you don't do it.

You who teach others, he says, do you not teach yourself? Christians often look at the world, don't we? And we say, you know, look how bad things are getting.

[ 7 : 34 ] And sometimes people point at the church and say, well, you're all hypocrites. And Paul says, both are right. True.

We're all at it. Jew and Gentile. Whichever side of these walls that we're sitting, no one is righteous. See, we can only say about ourselves, we're basically good.

We're fine. We're okay. As long as we get to set our own standard of what's right and wrong. In our house, there's jigsaw puzzle pieces everywhere at the minute, right?

You can't walk without picking some up on your feet. Caleb's in a jigsaw puzzle phase. But if we could tell him, if we told him, you know, just create your own challenge, your own jigsaw puzzle, right?

He would know how to do it, wouldn't he? He's created the puzzle. He would know how to put it back together. That's why we get him jigsaws out of a box. Because the standard needs to be set for him, not by him.

[ 8 : 41 ] Friends, the Bible says we don't get to set our own personal standard and call ourselves good when we achieve it. We don't get to make our own kind of personal challenge and then pat ourselves on the back when we can solve it.

God sets us a standard of living. And to be righteous, it simply means lining up with that standard. So, God draws a straight line. And when we stand next to it, do our lives bend? Do they zigzag? Do they line up? And so, how do we know? Where is the straight line that God has drawn? Where do we find his perfect standard?

Well, Paul says in our reading that it's in the law. Verse 19, now we know whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

[ 9 : 45 ] God's law, think of the Ten Commandments. They are his perfect character put into writing.

God loves life, so he forbids murder. God is faithful, so he forbids adultery. He never falls short of his perfect standards.

But who else can say that, really? Out of the heart, the mouth speaks, says Jesus. Think about the words that you've used this week.

Or not used, that you thought that you haven't said out loud. Their throat is an open grave. They use their tongues to deceive.

The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Friends, he's talking about us. Or life in general, choices that you've made, patterns that you've just slipped into without even necessarily thinking, that don't recognize God's rule.

[11:01] Or live up to the standard that he sets in his word. That's what verses 15, 16, 17 are talking about. It's how we go through life.

Their feet are swift to shed blood. In their paths are ruin and misery. The way of peace they have not known. Friends, whether we think it about ourselves or not, God says we are not right.

And even trying harder when works, says Paul, for by works of the law, no human being will be justified or called righteous in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. As well as the jigsaw puzzle pieces, this is what happens every day in our house too.

We say, boys, come here and get dressed. And you know, immediately, the thought it puts in their heads is, run away. And we're like that with God's law, the Ten Commandments.

Because we're unrighteous, the minute we hear it, we think, oh, that's a good idea. Theft. Lying. Right? We do the very thing it tells us not to do.

[12:15] And so the harder we try our best to keep the law, the more we want to break it. Dilemma. See the problem? We're not right.

So then how can we ever be God's standard? How can God call us righteous when we're not? Well, it's into that hopeless, bleak darkness that the light of the doctrine of justification shines.

Just have a look with me at chapter 3, verse 21. Just turn your eyes there. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law. Although the law and prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

We have no righteousness to point to and say, look, look, God, I'm good enough for you. I'm good enough. So instead of demanding what we cannot give Him, God sent His Son Jesus to us to give us His righteousness instead.

See, by coming as a man and taking our place before God, Jesus lived up to God's standard. He was righteous. And He kept God's law, the commandments, and He obeyed God without a fault so that that perfect straight line put Jesus up next to it and He lines up perfectly, perfectly.

[13:45] He is righteous. For every time that you have pushed God out of the picture, He has clung to God in worship and praise and thanks. And for every bitter or hateful word that has shown the corruption of your heart, He has spoken true and loving words that show the purity of His heart.

For every time, brothers and sisters, that you have disobeyed God's commands, He has obeyed.

God has now shown us a righteousness that doesn't come from the law, but comes from His life.

And the Bible tells us that that is a righteousness that we can claim simply by putting our trust in Jesus to do it for us.

The moment we put our trust in Jesus, God says we are righteous. He counts Jesus' perfect life as if it was ours so that we can then point to Him and say, look, God, there's my righteousness.

He's good enough and He's mine. Jesus lived up to your standards for me so that I can be right with you. As if every act of His obedience in His life and His death and resurrection was weaving together a covering of righteousness that God would take from Him and place on us.

[15:23] That's what happened at the cross. God stripped His Son of His perfect record and clothed Him in our sinful record. Verse 25 says, God put Him forward as a propitiation by His blood, a propitiation as a sacrifice that turns away God's anger.

So that it's as if Jesus was loaded down with our filthy, stinking rags of unrighteousness so that all God's anger against us was poured out on Him so that He deflected away from us the punishment and wrath that we deserve.

And instead, what does God do? He clothes us with Jesus' pure, spotless robe of righteousness so that we receive what He deserves instead.

to be welcomed, accepted by God, called righteous, to be even rewarded for His righteousness.

And friends, that is how God justifies us. That is how He can call people like me and you righteous in His sight. He declares us righteous so that even though we haven't changed, but our status before Him has changed from unrighteous to righteous.

[16:56] And I hope now we can see that's no small thing. That's a word worth knowing, isn't it?

For there's no distinction, says Paul, for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, all, and

are justified justified by His grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

So if you're here today and you don't know what you would say to God, maybe you came thinking that you knew what you would say to God on the last day or if you died, that you thought that you could say to Him, look, I've not been that bad, done okay, sort of balanced out maybe, but now you're not sure if that's ye.

You don't know what you would say to God. You don't need to go out from here and do better.

That's not what this is saying. It's saying you need Jesus' perfect rightness to cover you.

You need to put your faith in Him and His death for your sin and His righteous life to clothe you and give you a right standing before God. I was actually speaking to someone here who was here for the first time last week who said it takes a lot of hard work to be a spiritual person.

But you know the gospel actually says the opposite of that. Paul says God sent His Son to live, die, and rise again so that He could be just and the justifier of the one who not works hard at it but has faith in Jesus.

[ 18 : 30 ] You see, it's all on Him. He does it for us and He wants to do that for unrighteous people like me and ye. So if that's you, put your faith in Him today and have your stains and your imperfect and flawed record of disobedience taken away and be replaced with a perfect and spotless record of Jesus' obedience.

And God will call you righteous and give you the welcome that He gives to His own Son. And if you put your trust in Him, brothers and sisters, that is where you stand today.

Whether that was 50 years ago or five minutes ago, do you understand that you now are as righteous before God as you will ever be? Because He calls us righteous for His Son's perfection.

And that's just what I want to press into as we come to a close. How do we respond? What difference does that make to life now?

What does it change? Paul says, well, since we've been justified, what? Turn over to chapter 5.

Since we've been justified by faith, what? We rejoice.

[ 19 : 46 ] We rejoice. Just have a look again from verse 1, chapter 5. Therefore, since we've been justified by faith. So in light of all of that that we've seen in chapter 3, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Through Him, we've obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. You see, being justified, it's not a theoretical thing up here.

It should give us joy. It should hit the ground of our lives. Joy is one of the knock-on benefits of being justified that the catechism picks out.

It's not the only one, but since we're in Romans, that's where we're going to land. And in fact, Paul says, being justified should give us joy in three things.

Three things as we go from here. And we've seen one already, verse 2. We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God that we lost through our sin. Back in chapter 3, Paul says, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

[ 20 : 55 ] Take it there, he's talking not about God's own glory, but the glory that God made us for, that we have forfeited. Chapter 1, he says, we exchange the glory of the immortal God for creatures.

Adam gave up that glory when he listened to the serpent's lie and gave into it. But now that God has changed our status from being unrighteous to righteous, we have the hope of entering that glory again, to be restored to all that God created us to be in the beginning and more people and humanity in a world where there is no more crying and no more dying because there is no more sinning.

And so today, brothers and sisters, we can rejoice in the sure and certain hope, the definite prospect of not only being justified, but if justified, then glorified.

You know, I said at the start, these three words define where we are now today, not later in heaven, but now. And yet, what God says of us right now does give us a future and a hope so glorious that it changes our whole experience of life today.

God calling us righteous gives us this joyous expectation for the future that one day what God says of us will be true of us in our hearts and that we will be righteous as Jesus is righteous inside and out and that nothing in us would bend away from that perfect standard, that we would be conformed to the image of his Son.

[ 22 : 46 ] And if we've taken on board the seriousness of our not being right and our sin, well, that day should really excite us, fill us with great joy, you just think of the alternative on that day.

Think what God has changed. God brought forward the judgment day as Christ hung on the cross. He received from God what we deserve to face on that day, condemnation, so that when we arrive on that day, we won't be condemned to punishment in hell, but instead, given the glory that we traded away and given the glory that he rightly deserves.

Brothers and sisters, by declaring us righteous, God has changed our eternal destiny by, from plummeting rightly into a place of never-ending punishment, but since being justified by faith in Christ, God lifts us into a place of never-ending glory.

glory. So how do our hearts respond to that in our day-to-day, every day until then, with joy, with excitement, with rejoicing, with thanksgiving, since we have been justified through faith?

But perhaps you're also thinking, you know, my day-to-day, I just, I don't feel joyful. Right? That just feels so far from me.

[ 24 : 20 ] Life is really hard. And there are things that I go through that do not bring joy. And that reality feels so far from me.

But Luke Paul actually says, strangely, that verse 3, we also rejoice, not only that, we rejoice in our sufferings. So how does knowing that we're justified give us joy in suffering?

Now that's not to say we enjoy suffering. Right? It upsets us, it hurts us. We cry. I think the point is that since God has dealt with our very biggest problem, our unrightness, and taken away the worst outcome from us, well, it puts everything now into a different perspective.

There is nothing now that we can face that is worse than what we would have faced for our sin.

But we never have to face that consequence because Christ has taken it for us. So whatever suffering comes to us, and it has, but lots of us here, God has still spared us from the very worst.

[ 25 : 38 ] So nothing that we face now is the end of the world. And nothing that we go through now can destroy our lives because we have been justified.

And that truth doesn't make it a happy thing, but it enables us to keep going through suffering. Paul says it produces endurance. It enables us to press on to the day that we enter that promised glory. And as we keep going by faith, it produces character so that as we keep going, we're becoming more and more like Jesus. And as we grow more and more like him, look, verse 4, it produces hope so that in this strange way, brothers and sisters, as we suffer with faith, it actually deepens our hope in the glory to come, which means that when we're going through suffering, it doesn't have to steamroll our hearts.

It doesn't need to overwhelm us, but instead, we can have this lasting joy through suffering because our suffering will only press the truth and the wonder of what Christ has done for us even more firmly into our hearts.

You know, it'd be really tempting and easy, wouldn't it, to think a big, difficult word like justification isn't very practical. It's not very hands-on, right?

[ 27 : 04 ] Good to know, but how's it going to help me in my Christian life? Well, Paul says actually knowing you're justified completely changes the way that you face pain and difficulty.

Your justification matters for you in those really difficult relationships at school, at work, at church, at home.

It matters for you in loss and grief and illness and pain and difficulty. Your suffering can overwhelm us, it can shake us, but our justification gives us a firm place to cling to and tells us this is where you stand.

And nothing in this life can shake you and sweep you away from this place of right standing with God. If God has freely declared us right with him, we have a joy that our suffering cannot touch, brothers and sisters.

But he saves the best till last. Just have a look at verse 11. Since we've been justified, more than that, he says, we rejoice in God himself. Now, maybe that sounds really obvious to you.

[ 28 : 18 ] we come to church to worship God, but it's not obvious. And let me just illustrate that with a story from Martin Luther. Some of you have heard me say something like this before, but it's so worth repeating.

Martin Luther was a monk. He lived about 500 years ago in Germany. And to him, the idea of a righteous God was terrifying.

God's perfect standard hanging over him put fear in his heart so much so, even though he knew God, he said, I hated God.

I hated God. I hated his finger pointing at me, his rod hanging over me, his rules governing my day to day and falling short all the time.

So he beat himself up and he went to confess his sins for hours and hours endlessly. He couldn't get enough. He couldn't do enough. And he tried really hard to be the best monk that he could and the best person, but he couldn't.

[ 29 : 20 ] But then, as he studied the book of Romans, he saw that God's righteousness comes to us not by working hard, but by putting our trust and one who's done it for us.

And he said, at that moment, it was as if the gates of heaven swung open in front of him and his heart was flooded with the peace and joy and love of God.

And he found then that he could actually enjoy God, enjoy worshipping and serving him because now God wasn't breathing down his neck and telling him off all the time because he counted him and called him righteous and covered him with a spotless cloak of righteousness simply by trusting in Christ.

So, do you see how that changes our whole relationship with God? You imagine living with someone who's always telling you you're getting it wrong. You couldn't enjoy that relationship, could you?

But now imagine living with someone who says, you're perfect to me. I delight in you.

[ 30 : 43 ] We would love to live with that person, wouldn't we? We would delight in that relationship. We would enjoy it. We would enjoy that person. And that, says Paul, is what we gain from being justified.

More than that, we rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Because, do you understand, brothers and sisters, that since this is true that it's God who tells us that we are perfect in his sight. It is God who delights in us. It's God who calls us righteous. And it's God who's done it for us. And so what?

We rejoice in him. We rejoice in him. Friends, I wonder, can I ask, do you enjoy God? Do you enjoy him?

Who is God to you? Is he the taskmaster always telling you you're getting it wrong? Or is he the loving father who tells you, I delight in you because you are in my son?

[ 31 : 49 ] Do you enjoy him? It's so basic, so elementary. The first question in our catechism says this, doesn't it? That our whole purpose in life is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

That's what we're here for. So do you? Do you enjoy him? We can only enjoy God if we are justified by faith in his son.

We can only love him if we're right with him. And so brothers and sisters, I hope we can see that this truth of justification changes life for us now.

It's not a theory or an idea or just a long word and it's not something for the future. It is something that cashes out right now that we gain here as we put our trust in Jesus.

It's a daily reality that we can enjoy as a Christian. This is where you stand if your faith is in Jesus. God calls you righteous.

[ 32 : 52 ] And so friends, let us respond with that joy. Let us have that excitement in our day to day, not just as we sing to God in church, but as we walk through life, as we face suffering and difficulty, as we enjoy God together.

Let us rejoice in him and let us rejoice in the hope of his glory. Let's pray that we would have that joy. Now let's pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray.