

I, Luther  
Romans 3:19-28

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the Word of God this day. Amen.

*This is a first person sermon – pretending to be Martin Luther*

“Since all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, they are now justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption of Jesus Christ.” Could it really be that easy? We are made justified by the grace of Jesus Christ. We receive Salvation by Faith Alone. Could it be that uncomplicated? We are Justified by Grace through Faith.- Justified by Grace through Faith – Justified by Grace through Faith! Remarkably simple isn't it, its right there plain as day, so why was it so hard for people to see? Don't get me wrong I didn't always know about this free grace either, but once you discover it right there in the scriptures you can never unlearn it. Friends would tell me "Luther, you're insane" or sometimes I would just see them point their fingers at me, whisper about me and shake their heads as if I were a leper or something, unclean, unworthy. People cautioned me, worried about me, prayed about me, and threatened me. Luther Stop, Luther Your Wrong. Luther that isn't right. Luther you're speaking heresy! I heard all these things. But look at the words of Paul again "Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith." Can I be wrong? It is so clear even in this translation from the Greek, we see that we all are fallen. And all are given justification by grace through faith. Do you see it? Do you see the grace? Do you understand how amazing and revolutionary this is and yet so simple?

I don't think you fully get it. This is amazing freedom. Take it from me I know. I was born and baptized Martin Luther, son of Hans Luther. Hans, my father was a strong, strict man. He pulled himself up from miner to owner, to a well to do merchant of the community. My dad always was striving to be better, nothing was good enough. He forced that same attitude on me, I was never good enough. Nothing I did could please him. He sent me to school years before most of my class mates. When all my friends finished their schooling after eight years, he pushed me on to a new school a few towns away. I enjoyed learning, but I kept feeling like I could never live up to my father's demands. No matter how I did my father wanted more. Upon graduation from the higher school. My father insisted and pulled some strings to get me enrolled in the law program at the University of Erfurt. He had dreams of me

making him proud by becoming a rich lawyer. He knew by the education he paid for that I had the smarts to do it, but truthfully my heart was never in it, there had to be something else.

At University my eyes first began to open when I stumbled upon a bible. You know a complete word for word handwritten Bible right there in the Library for anybody to read. I had never seen one before, people just didn't own them. Yes we hear the preacher read whatever he choose to read from it each Sunday, but that's it. So when I first saw this Bible in the library I poured myself into it, I read it. I cherished each and every word. I fed on the Word of God itself.

Anyway during those times I was struggling with my faith. I had been told that I was no good, my father told me that, my teachers told me that, the priests told me that. Everywhere I went and everything I heard was that I was a sinner, imperfect, not right with God, deserving punishment, death, and damnation. I heard that each week in the worship. God hates sin, we are sinners so God hates us. The Bible was filled with scenes of judgment, stories of people that were an abomination in the eyes of God. I feared, down to my core that judgment day that is most assuredly coming, when the scales of good and evil would find me wanting, and I would be cast out into the abyss of darkness and suffering for eternity. For eternity! That scared me to my core. How can I find my way out. How can I redeem myself. How can I be saved, me a sinner, how would God ever accept me into the glory of the Kingdom.

One day I was walking back to school after a holiday at home, my mind filled with my fears and doubts. When all of a sudden out on the road a storm blew up and lightening was cracking all around me. I fell on my knees and looked to heaven and prayed to St. Anne for protection. I made a deal right then and there that if I survived that day on the open road during a thunderstorm that I would give up my law pursuit and join the monastery, I would try to become holy and good, I would submit to the faith.

And as you can see I lived. So I, Martin Luther, the son that was supposed to be the rich lawyer, became a monk to the hatred of my father and the rest of my family. I joined the Augustinian order. I lived a life of reflection, prayer, and reading and worship. You think it would be easy to be good and find peace with God there wouldn't you? But I found no peace in behind those walls. I prayed over and over to God for guidance. I asked myself over and over again what it was that I could do to make myself perfect, and so right before God. But I kept returning to that image of my soul in the heavenly kingdom standing before the throne of the almighty, God the Creator and sustainer and destroyer of all life. What could I do or say to make God pleased with me. Joseph was faithful enough to forgive his brothers for selling him

into slavery but instead all the people of Israel were handed over to be slaves in Egypt for 400 years. Moses with faithful enough to lead 600,000 people of God's choosing in a desert for 40 years, but he was still exiled from the promised land for one mistake he did. King David followed God from a boy but gave into one desire which angered God against him and handed him over for punishment. If these Great men of so much faith could not make God happy, what chance did I have to stand before the Almighty Lord on that Day of Judgment and be saved. There was no hope. And so in all my study and prayers and confession I found myself sinking even deeper into my depression.

Years in the monastery did not help my soul searching. I was tormented by the devil and all the sayings I had heard read. That I was worthless. I was a sinner. I was a fallen creature.

Even years later as a professor at Wittenberg I still worried about faith. How can I be saved? How can you be saved? We are sinners, worthy of punishment and death.

At Wittenberg these thoughts got even worse. Wittenberg in its day was a center of religious relics. People would pay money to see and pray at these supposed things, these strands of Jesus' beard, the wood from the cross, the nails that were in Jesus' hands, a feather from the angel Gabriel. A beam from the ark of Noah. A piece of straw from the manger. People had been told if they pay and pray upon these "items" then they can be saved. And if that wasn't bad enough Titzel on a mission for Rome was traveling around Germany preaching and selling indulgences. Taking advantage of the uneducated and educated alike, he was convincing people that if they paid enough they could get a note of forgiveness from the pope for their loved one's sins or even their own. As if you could buy your way into God's love. If it were that easy I would have been the first one in line. But that silly payment for a piece of paper does not make God happy. If I believed, based on the Word of God in scripture, that if I just held on to the right relic of Religious importance and prayed the right way, kneeling and kissing steps, or just paying for a piece of paper, and indulgence then I would have been the first in line to do this. But I couldn't find anywhere in God's word that this teaching was supported. So I fretted about my eternal soul, how do I make God happy. How do I make myself good enough to appease the Lord supreme?

Then suddenly one night it was like a beam of light had struck me. I had read it many times and never read it. It was if the gates swung open, and I entered into paradise. I was free from the guilt, the self loathing, the self hatred, the unworthiness. Not by a relic, or a prayer, or a sum of money, or being good, but through Christ.

You see it was right there the whole time. God created us with free will. We could live following the law or turn away. We fell turning away in our sin, Adam once walked with God, but because of sin we could no longer stand before God, we had fallen. And we sinned over and over again falling over and over again away from God. The only way we could come once again into God's presence is if God would come down to us, we could never reach up and claim that right. God reached down into this world, became man, lived, and taught and sweated, and prayed, and sang, and talked, and walked with us once again on earth. Eventually offering up his own body into our hands for us, bearing the punishment we deserve, freeing us from our sinfulness. So that nothing could separate us ever again from his presence, not sin, and not death, Because he conquered them for us. We couldn't do it, so he did it.

Now do you see the amazing strength, hope and promise found in three verses from Romans, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice for atonement by his blood, effective through faith. Believe in Jesus Christ, by his blood shed for you, by his body offered up for you, he gives you forgiveness from your sins, he makes you justified and He will offer you the Grace and Justification to come before God and be loved. Justified by Grace through Faith. Simple but so powerful. I am justified by God's grace through the faith in Jesus Christ. You are Justified by Grace through faith. Isn't that Great. Simple Grace. Hear the Word of God and know the truth! You are justified by grace through Faith. Amen.

May the peace and grace of God be with you this day and throughout the week to come.

Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs:

Heavenly Father, we praise your name for the gift of your saving grace. You sent your Son as a sacrifice for all so that we may come before you in your Heavenly kingdom. You have bestowed on us your saving power over death, making a place for each one of us in your kingdom. For this gift Lord we sing praises to you.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY: hear our prayer

Almighty Lord, we pray for all who confess faith in Christ. When our hearts grow cold with despair or skepticism, warm us with the light of the Holy Spirit. Drive us to search for a continual reformation, a deeper searching for the faith, a striving for the grace you offer us so freely. Empower us to be your children, inheritors together of your grace through your Son, Jesus Christ. Inspire us and comfort us, in your Spirit to do the things that you would have us do.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY: hear our prayer.

God, we pray for St. Paul, the people who gather here in your Name. Empower us to face the truth. The truth found only in your word, not in traditions or societal opinions, but solely through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Lead us to seek that truth that you are Lord, that you are all powerful, that you are our first concern above all other concerns. Through your Word continue to bless us as your children and with all the faithful around the world.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY: hear our prayer

Lord we keep in our hearts and minds all those that troubled this day with physical or mental anguish. There are those who have lost loved ones, those destroyed by disasters, there are people struggling with illnesses, and anxieties. We especially pray this day remembering the sick, the shut-ins, the hurt and the scared, the worried, and the lonely seeking your Comfort and peace especially *Howell Crawford, Gladys Garrett* and all those we lift up before you now.....

LORD IN YOUR MERCY: hear our prayer

Into your hands o Lord we commend all for whom we pray trusting in your mercy, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.