

[John 1:29:] John [the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

1. "I didn't see it coming!" That statement is heard in so many situations. Maybe it was a person who stepped in front of a car and had a near miss. Maybe it's the sports player who got duped and looked foolish. Maybe it's not even sight: maybe it's a person who didn't hear or otherwise sense what's going on around them. No matter what, the person who was startled, looked foolish, or wasn't ready had something happen to them that made them exclaim, "I didn't see it coming!" But, no matter how you slice it, it happened.
2. One thing about popular society's present way of thinking is that if I want it to be so, then that's the way it should be. So, if "I didn't see it" becomes what people want, then that's the way they feel it should be. But here's the problem with that way of thinking: just because you didn't see it, it still happened. What we don't see still startles us. What we don't see still makes us look bad. What we don't see still happens whether we're ready or not.
3. When John the Baptist cried out, Look, the Lamb of God, Jesus remained the Lamb of God whether people saw Him or not. Jesus still remains the only One [W]ho takes away the sin of the world whether people see Him or not. God made sure it's recorded that Jesus died on the cross, rose again, and ascended into heaven. Jesus' actions took our sin away. No matter how you slice it, it happened.
4. Whether people see it or not, what Jesus gave us through His saving work also happened. The Good News is that Jesus justified us when His perfect life was given in place of our imperfect lives. *Justification* means that we are declared not-guilty in God's eyes, righteous because Christ is our righteousness. The reading we have from Romans 3 talks all about it. The teaching that God did it all is the good news that was brought back to the forefront of the visible church at the time of the Lutheran Reformation and the reason we have this reading today.
5. We're going to focus on both aspects of justification from our reading today. And it's all good news! No matter how you slice it, justification is good news. {Read verses 19-20.}
6. Wait! "Pastor, you said good news was coming!" We just heard there's nothing we can do to make ourselves righteous before God. *Any* attempts of us trying to be good enough fail. How is that good news? It's good news because we can't ... and shouldn't even try ... to save ourselves. Instead, God did it for us, whether people see it or not. {Read verses 21-24.}
7. In that brief, dense section of Scripture, we see both aspects of justification side-by-side. Those who believe Jesus is their righteousness and that He took their sin away are declared justified. Since the subjects know that Jesus did this, it's called *subjective justification*. We join John the Baptist to point at Jesus and say, "Look! The Lamb of God takes away the world's sins—Jesus takes away *my* sin!" God's gift of faith holds onto the redemption—the buying us back—from our sin. It is purely God's grace—His undeserved love for us—that puts seeing Jesus in our hearts.
8. For us—joy of joys!—justification is good news. Remember this too: no matter how you

slice it, justification is good news. The all who sinned (and "all" means all) are also declared justified, whether they see it or not. It objectively true because God says it's true. The Lamb of God took away the sins of the whole world, whether people see it or not. That is called *objective justification*.

9. What's sad is that if people don't see it—don't believe in Jesus—they don't receive the benefit. They are like the person who stepped off the curb and didn't see the car coming, the sports player who got duped, or the person who wasn't ready. The information is objectively there. Sadly, it's just that they didn't notice it. And even more sadly, modern society embraces everything a person does and even says that's the way it's supposed to be—even not noticing what is objectively true. The consequences are the worst possible when it comes to justification. If we don't know what's objectively true, we can claim all we want: "I didn't see it coming." It doesn't matter. The *it* that's coming for unbelief is eternal punishment in hell. That's what Jesus came to save us from.
10. Amazing is God's grace and patience for all. He is patient with those who don't know that He has justified us. He is also patient with us who know that He has justified us. For we all have that old sinful nature that tries to take a little credit for our righteousness instead of relying on the good news of justification, no matter how you slice it: objective or subjective. {Read verses 25-28.}
11. Justified by grace through faith: one of the battle cries of the Lutheran Reformation. And we continually need that message reinforced. We cannot boast in our own works before God. We cannot boast in the gift of faith either. That's given to us by God as well. As Paul elsewhere said in 2 Corinthians 10:17, "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord." God is worth boasting in because we are justified by God. We are declared not-guilty for thinking that we get at least a little credit for our righteousness. We are declared not-guilty for not seeing the righteousness God gives us in Christ Jesus to begin with. No matter how you slice it, justification is good news.
12. So here's how it applies. For us who know Jesus, we take great comfort in subjective justification. We join Job to say, I know that my [R]edeemer lives. And for us who know Jesus, we also take great comfort in objective justification. There is not a person in this world for whom Jesus did not die. Not only does that mean it *has* to be for me, but also it means that it *has* to be for the people around us who say, "I didn't see it coming." The *it* becomes eternal life now that gives us heaven when we die instead of eternal punishment in hell. That's what we get to share with all, knowing God still enlightens the eyes of hearts to make what's objectively true also subjectively true. No matter how you slice it, justification is good news. Amen.