

Peace and Hope: Romans 5:1-5

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In our study through Romans we come this morning to a new section of the letter. Last week we completed chapter 4, and this morning we begin chapter 5. Remember the structure of the letter so far. In Romans 1:16-17 Paul gave this thesis statement, the theme verses of the entire letter. *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”*” (Romans 1:16–17, ESV)

Then Paul launched into a long discussion of depravity. He needed to make it abundantly clear that we are all sinners. That was Romans 1:18 – 3:20. And then he made that glorious turn to the Gospel message, in 3:21: *“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:”* (Romans 3:21–22, ESV)

And from there all the way through the end of chapter 4 (chapter 4 focusing on Abraham), Paul has expounded the great doctrine of justification by faith alone. Our sins are forgiven, and we are counted righteous before God, and this happens by faith, not by works.

Now, in chapter 5, Paul begins to draw some implications from these truths. Notice the logic of verse 1. “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith . . .” Do you see, in that short phrase he is summarizing the previous section. “Since we have been justified by faith . . .” Since we have been counted righteous in God’s sight, not by working for Him, but by believing His promises. That is the bedrock truth of the Gospel. And now we’re going to see some of the amazing fruit of that.

Peace with God

“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have *peace with God* through our Lord Jesus Christ.” This term, peace, has a rich Old Testament background. It’s not simply the absence of hostility or enmity. But it includes active blessing from God. For instance, the pronouncement of blessing in Numbers 6: *“The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine*

upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.” (Numbers 6:24–26, ESV)

Or Isaiah 52:7, which Paul quotes part of in Romans 10:15: *“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.””* (Isaiah 52:7, ESV)

We also think of Isaiah 9:6, a verse that is quoted often this time of year: *“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”* (Isaiah 9:6, ESV)

And turning to the New Testament, we see the fulfillment of this in Jesus Christ. Even at His birth, the angels declared, in Luke 2:14, *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.”*

Here in Romans 5:1 Paul speaks specifically of the peace we have with God. Just a few verses later, in verses 10-11, he mentions reconciliation, which is to bring together two parties who have been enemies. Anyone who is not justified by faith is an enemy of God. We were all by nature children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3). But for those who are reconciled to Him, we are no longer enemies. We are no longer under His wrath. But instead, we are His friends. We have peace with Him.

And notice how this comes about, in Romans 5:1, *“ . . . we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Paul explained this in that great paragraph in chapter 3 (verses 21-26). He spoke there of God the Father putting Jesus Christ forward as a propitiation by his blood. That means that Jesus bore the wrath that our sin deserves. God’s wrath is against us, against our sin. But God poured out that wrath on Jesus. So this peace that we have with God is through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Access into Grace

Another amazing fruit of justification is access into grace. This is verse 2, *“Through him [that is, through our Lord Jesus Christ] we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand . . .”* As believers, we now stand in a relationship of grace. We have peace with God, and an aspect of that peace is having access to Him and to His grace.

Remember in the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve were cast out of God’s presence, and God placed cherubim there

with flaming swords to prevent access. Their sin separated them from God.

The veil in the Temple is another representation of the separation between sinful humanity and our holy God. And do you remember what happened to that veil as Jesus died on the cross? God tore it in two, from top to bottom. The only means by which we have access to God is through the sacrifice of Jesus. Apart from that we have no right to enter into the Most Holy Place. We have no right to venture into God's presence. We would be struck down. God cannot allow sinful humanity into His presence. His righteousness cannot allow it. But because of Jesus' blood there is access to God. He has opened the way for us, so that we can have confidence to enter the holy places, so that we can draw near with a true heart and in full assurance of faith.

Think about that as you pray. Marvel at that as you pray. We can commune with the holy God of the universe because Jesus died and the veil was torn in two. Through Jesus Christ we have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand.

Rejoicing in Hope of the Glory of God

Next, we come to yet another amazing result of our justification, and that is hope. Friends, this is what is so wonderful about the Christian faith. We have a rock solid hope that God is going to do good to us for all eternity. That is the future we look forward to. And hope is an amazing thing to have. Because our perception of the future greatly affects how we feel and act in the present. If the future looks bad, we feel depressed and act grumpy. And we're probably not as likely to take an interest in others or want to help others. But if the future looks really good, we feel great and are more likely to be generous. These things hold true if we're thinking about the economy, for instance. Or if you're thinking about your job situation—whether the opportunities look good for you there, or not so good. Or if you're thinking about certain relationships in your life that mean a lot to you. Our perception of the future has a huge impact on how we feel and act in the present.

And this is what we're talking about when we talk about hope. And it's far, far more significant when we're talking about eternity. Do you have hope for the future, in the most ultimate sense? When you look down the road, not just to the coming decades of your career, or to the prospects of a comfortable retirement, but to eternity, do you feel hopeful? And, if so, why? Do you have hope? And what is the basis for your hope?

Many people might say, “Well, I hope I’ll go to heaven when I die.” And what they mean by that is, I’m not really sure if that will happen, but I’d like it to. It’s like asking the question, “Do you think the Steelers are going to win?” And you respond, “I don’t know, but I sure hope so.” The great theologian of our day, R. C. Sproul, used that very illustration, and I thought you all would be glad to know that Sproul is a passionate Steelers fan.¹ Some of you might have more of a desire to read his books now that you know that. Not that you should evaluate theologians based on what football team they root for, but still, it is nice to know that he has sound doctrine, and he’s rooting for the right team.

The point is, we often use the word hope when we’re referring to things we don’t actually have much assurance about. But that’s not the way the Bible speaks of hope. The hope we have as a result of our justification is a hope in something that will most surely come to pass. It is a sure hope.

First, Paul mentions our rejoicing in hope of the glory of God (verse 2). A similar verse, which says a bit more, is Titus 2:13, “*waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,*” (Titus 2:13, ESV)

We can have a firm confidence in the fact that Jesus Christ is coming back someday, and He will return in all His glory. For many that will be a terrifying day and a day of punishment, for those who are apart from Christ. But for those who are in Christ by faith, we look forward to that day with great anticipation. That is when we will finally be totally rid of all sinful inclinations. That is when justice will be served completely and finally. That is when we will enter God’s presence in a way we never have before, and we will enjoy being with Him forever. And God “will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore” (Revelation 21:4). These are the things we long for, the things we pray for, the things we hope for with a confident hope in our God who always keeps His promises.

Hope in Suffering

Now, the next thing Paul says about hope is bit shocking. He says that we not only rejoice in hope of the glory of God, but we also rejoice in our sufferings. Rejoice in our sufferings? That seems odd! That’s completely contrary to our nature. We like to complain in our sufferings. We like to take out our frustrations on

¹ Sproul, *Romans*, page 146.

other people. We might plot revenge against someone who wronged us and caused the trial. Or we might try to convince ourselves and others that we're strong enough to endure these trials on our own. I don't need God. I don't need help. I'm strong enough and smart enough to get through this myself. That kind of response may seem commendable, but it is extremely prideful. The thought that we can endure trials in our own strength. If we think that, then we think way too highly of ourselves.

Another response that is just as prideful, although it manifests itself very differently, is self-pity. This would be another sinful way to respond to trials, and it's another way of thinking too highly of ourselves. We think, "I'm too good for this. I don't deserve this. This trial should be happening to someone else, but not to me."

Well, this biblical reality that Christians can rejoice in suffering, we must recognize that it is contrary to our sinful nature. And therefore we need to recognize that to rejoice in suffering is an utterly supernatural phenomenon. It is a profound fruit of faith that God produces in our lives. And we ought to pray for this. We ought to ask that God will humble us and give us grateful hearts and give us a greater understanding of His sovereign goodness. He can do that. We've seen Him do it! I'm sure many of us can look back on significant trials in our lives and recognize that apart from God's grace, it would have devastated us. We would have wallowed in self-pity, or become embittered, or depressed. But instead, even though there was discouragement, and probably some self-pity and bitterness, there was also a sense of joy, knowing that God was in control and had a good plan. That is an amazing evidence of God's grace! It is not something that we could produce on our own. And therefore when we see ourselves or others rejoicing in suffering, we should marvel at God's power to bring this about.

Why can we rejoice in our suffering? Verse 3 says, "we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance." And the logic is, "we rejoice in our sufferings, [because] we know that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope." Let's not read over that word "knowing" too quickly. We must know biblical truth in order to live godly lives. Do you want to be able to rejoice in your sufferings? Well, it's going to involve knowing some things. You need to understand some important truths from God's Word. You need to comprehend the Gospel. We're not going to grow in godliness if we're not growing in our

knowledge of biblical truth. We have to know these things, and that knowledge must engage our hearts and transform our lives.

I want to read two other New Testament passages that are very similar to this one. James 1:2-4 says, “*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*” (James 1:2–4, ESV)

And 1 Peter 1:6-7 says, “In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” That phrase translated, “the tested genuineness of your faith,” is the same phrase in James 1:3, “the testing of your faith.” And it’s the same concept that Paul has in mind in writing about the process of suffering producing endurance and character. The picture here is the refinement and purification of precious metals. These metals have to go through the fire—they have to be heated to extreme temperatures—in order to get rid of the imperfections and impurities. The process begins with ore: iron ore, gold ore, lead ore. But the ore only becomes valuable if it can be purified. You don’t see women wearing jewelry made of gold ore, because it’s ugly. And hopefully you don’t find buildings made of iron ore, because it’s weak. But when the impurities are removed, through fire, then the ore becomes something beautiful, something strong.

Our lives must be tested. We must be refined. God must take us through the fire in order to remove our impurities and imperfections and make us stronger. This is how we are sanctified. Have you noticed that it’s usually in the most difficult times of life that God teaches us the most significant lessons? It’s the hard things that mature us. It’s going through the fire that removes the imperfections. Encountering various trials is the crucible in which our faith is refined.

Let’s ask the question: How is this? How is it that trials serve as a crucible? How do trials refine our faith? How does suffering produce endurance and character? Suffering refines our faith because it makes us rely more on God, and less on ourselves. I said earlier how we can be tempted to respond to trials with a prideful attitude, thinking we can handle this. But as God refines us through these trials, He teaches us that we *cannot* make it on our own. We can’t rely on our own strength. We must rely on Him, and on Him alone. This is a very humbling realization, and it’s also very freeing. It brings about great hope in God, because we

see Him taking care of us, and we see glimpses of His goodness to us even in the suffering.

Also, as God leads us through trials, and we see God sustain us through those trials, we have hope in His ability to see us through the next trial. At least, this is what *should* happen. Often we have very short memories when it comes to remembering God's faithfulness to us. But we should be able to look at how God has been with us in past trials, and how He is with us in present trials, and know that He will also be with us in future trials. And as we see the work He's doing in our lives through these trials, we can have confidence that we truly belong to Him, and thus we have hope.

A Plea to Unbelievers

If you're an unbeliever here this morning, I want to speak to you specifically for a moment. This hope that I'm talking about is only available to those who trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sin. You see, all of us have sinned against God. We have disobeyed Him. We turn our back on Him and we run after other things to make us happy. Because of our sin, we deserve eternal punishment. That's what we all deserve, and if you are still living in rebellion against God, if you are not trusting in Christ alone, then you will receive that eternal punishment. Apart from Christ there is NO hope. Apart from Christ, your suffering will NOT produce endurance or character or hope. Apart from Christ, your life will be futile, and then you'll die and spend eternity in hell.

So I plead with you: Come to Christ! Trust in Him. He died on the cross for sinners like you and like me, and He rose from the dead on the third day. In Him there is hope. In Him there is forgiveness of sin and the promise of eternal life with Him in heaven. One of the great promises of the Bible is found in Romans 8:28, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." That is an amazing promise, that *all things* will somehow work together for our good. But notice that this is a promise for those who love God, those who are called according to his purpose. In other words, this is a promise for all Christians. But if you are not a Christian, then you can have no hope in the midst of your trials. You can have no confidence that these trials are going to work together for good, unless you come to Christ. Repent of your sin, and trust in Jesus. And you will find this hope that Paul writes about. You will see everything from a new perspective. There will be genuine hope—confident hope—even in the midst of the most difficult trials.

Endurance, Character, Hope

When we endure suffering, and by God's grace are even able to rejoice in the midst of it, that produces endurance. And enduring trials in this way produces character. And as we see God sanctifying us in these ways, it bolsters our confidence in His power and His promises. And it gives us confidence that on the last day we will not be put to shame, but will be received into God's presence. So Paul's teaching on hope comes full circle in these verses. In verse 2 it was "hope of the glory of God." And in verse 5, "hope does not put us to shame." Both of those statements anticipate the Lord's return. Hope is forward-looking, yearning for Christ to return. And through the refinement of suffering we see God working in us and sanctifying us, and that gives us confidence that we truly belong to Him. The last day will not bring shame for us, but glory.

God's Love

There's yet another assurance of this, which Paul states in verse 5. We are assured of this hope, "because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." That is a wonderful verse to meditate on and pray over. If you are justified by faith, then God loves you with an infinite love. He has given you His Holy Spirit, and through the Spirit has poured His love into your heart. That ought to give us great hope in suffering. God is not against you. He is for you. He loves you so much that He wants to draw you closer and closer to Himself. And that's a process that will often involve pain, because He has to pry various idols out of our hands. That hurts, but it has to happen.

Examples of Rejoicing in Suffering

I want to close by looking at two biblical examples of rejoicing in suffering. I think of Joseph, back in the book of Genesis, as someone who endured various trials. His brothers hated him. They almost killed him, and then sold him into slavery. In Egypt Joseph was accused falsely by Potiphar's wife, and he was sent to prison. In prison he helped the cupbearer, but then the cupbearer forgot about Joseph for two whole years. Just imagine the bitterness and resentment and hatred that he might have felt. Imagine the desire for revenge he might have had. But by God's grace Joseph was able to bear up under these various trials. He was able to endure and even have contentment in God. That doesn't mean he didn't struggle with bitterness or self-pity. But he knew that God was with him, and he had hope. His suffering produced endurance and character.

And the evidence of grace in his life is seen so vividly in how he dealt with his brothers. He had the opportunity to exact revenge, but instead he forgave them. And he told them, “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today” (Genesis 50:20). Joseph saw his trials in the bigger picture of God’s sovereignty and God’s goodness. He could have been so embittered and enraged if he had viewed his trials through the narrow lens of his own “rights” and his own worth and his own selfish desires. But God enabled him to see these things through the wide lens of God’s good plan.

Let Joseph be an example to you in the midst of your suffering. Cling to the promise that, though others may have evil intentions, God is working all things together for your good, if you are a Christian.

Another powerful example of perseverance and joy in the midst of trials is found in the New Testament in Acts 5. The apostles were arrested and put in prison. And then during the night “an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out” and told them to keep preaching (Acts 5:19-20). The captain of the temple and the chief priests were perplexed about what had happened. But then someone saw the apostles teaching in the temple, and they were brought before the council. And the high priest said, “‘We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.’” But Peter and the apostles answered, “‘We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him’” (verses 28-32). The council didn’t like these words. It says, “‘When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them.’” But a Pharisee named Gamaliel stepped in and advised them to leave these men alone. And they took his advice. Rather than killing them, they just beat them. Verse 40 says, “‘when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.’” Then verse 41 is such an amazing example of joy in suffering. It says, “‘Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.’”

That's perseverance and joy in the midst of suffering. I pray that God will enable us to rejoice in our sufferings, and that the trials in our lives will produce endurance and character and hope.