

The Best Life Ever

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[0 : 00] Recently, we had an offer from a family wanting to exchange homes who were living in Australia. And when I read the description, I couldn't wait to see the pictures.

Their house was situated on the coast. In fact, it literally overhangs the sea. From their balcony, you can go fishing.

Or you can launch their kayaks from the deck that's underneath. Swimming and barbecues seemed to be the local pastimes. It was really quite amazing.

And as I looked out of my window and I looked across the road to a row of houses, and I looked beyond that to more houses and beyond that to just more concrete and wet, damp, horrible leaves, I began to dream.

Dreaming away, rod in one hand, barbecue fork in the other. The evening sun, the smell of grilled steak. I could get used to this.

[1 : 04] This would be a great life. But because of costs, and it was just pictures on a website, it's going to remain a dream.

But what is a reality, and what is even better than all of this, is that someone has actually exchanged places with me so that I can have the best life ever.

Someone has literally swapped lives with me so that we can experience life as it was intended to be. Look at verse 1 of chapter 5.

Do you see that little phrase there, those three words, justified through faith?

It's like a summary term for the whole of chapters 1 to 4. Because it's telling us everything that Jesus has done for us.

[2 : 05] That Jesus Christ came to exchange places with us. He has swapped his life for our life. Jesus Christ came and he took the place of a sinner.

Guilty and condemned. And he suffers the wrath and the judgment of God for us. Because in other words, Jesus is treated as we deserve to be treated, so that by faith we are treated as Jesus deserves to be treated.

We can see this even at the end of verse 8, where it says, While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

His life for our life. That's what it means to be justified by faith. Because Jesus has exchanged places with us, we are declared acceptable to God.

But that is only the beginning. The result of this new position is something that we are to experience each and every day.

[3 : 15] Look at verse 11. It says, Not only is this so, not only are we put right with God, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Reconciliation means that we can enjoy a living and a vibrant relationship with Jesus today. No longer are we his enemies. We are now his friends. And all this is possible because Jesus exchanged places with us.

And the big message of Romans at this point, as we march into chapter 5, is that the gospel is not just something explained, which is chapters 1 to 4, but it is something to be experienced.

And we will see this as we go from chapters 5 through to 8. It's not just what Jesus has done, but what it means to be in a living relationship with Jesus today.

So how can we have this best life ever? Well, first of all, we are to experience the gospel each day.

[4 : 27] It's not just something that we look to in the past, an event where we became a believer. It is something to be experienced each day. Look at verse, let's read from verse 1 again.

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we now have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into his grace in which we now

stand, and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

Do you see all the benefits there? Because of what Jesus has done, we now have peace with God, we stand in his grace, and we have the hope of glory.

I want you for a minute, and I think this will be quite easy for you to do, because it is quite cold, to picture yourself under a great waterfall, except this waterfall is fresh, and it's very warm.

And at the bottom of this waterfall, as you stand underneath it, is this great pool of water. And from this great big pool is a series of smaller waterfalls which kind of flow from it, which fills up other little pools around the base, where you can swim and relax.

[5 : 46] Now that's what we have a picture of here. The main pool is like the relationship we have with Christ, justified by faith, our relationship with God.

But from the overflow of that, we have peace, and we have grace, and we have the hope of glory. Because when the gospel is fully experienced in our life, it literally overflows into every area of our life.

So let's look at these three pools in turn. First of all, we have peace with God. Peace is not just the absence of an enemy, but it is the presence of a friend.

Chapters 1 to 4, as we saw, went to great lengths to explain that we were enemies of God, under His just judgment. But now because of Christ we're forgiven, we're no longer His enemies, but we're His friends.

And it says here in verse 1 that we now have peace with God. And that peace is not unlike the peace that was present in the Garden of Eden. Man in unity and harmony with His Creator.

[7 : 00] There was a sense of safety and security, a place of well-being, a place of wholeness. They were in search of nothing. They weren't endlessly striving for things, because they had everything.

And so with our peace with God, we are satisfied and fulfilled with Christ, because we have all that we ever need in Him.

And that is something we are to enjoy today, a living and vibrant relationship with God. But not only do we have peace with God, and again if you keep that picture of the waterfall in mind, flowing into the other pool is that we are standing in grace.

Do you see it there in verse 2? It says, Through whom we have gained access by faith into His disgrace in which we now stand.

Grace is something we talk about a lot. It is God's continuous generosity towards us which is unearned and undeserved. In practice it means that God doesn't treat us as our sins deserve.

[8 : 11] He treats us instead as His own Son, loved and treasured. You see, because of what Jesus has done, because of His grace, all our sin is covered.

Our past sin, our present sin, and our future sin. So that means that when I fall, or when I sin, it doesn't mean that I fall out of God's favour.

And that I have to somehow work my way back into that relationship and do something good so that He looks upon me and says, Yes, now I'm pleased with you. No, it means that because of His grace, we are forgiven, we are accepted, we are welcomed despite our sin.

So we are people who stand in grace, safe and secure, never removed from His presence, always loved and treasured as His children.

That is something we are to experience each and every day. But not only that, look at verse 3, not only so, but we rejoice, or sorry, the end of verse 2, we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

[9 : 26] Now I think we all know through our own experience, and the experience of others, that we live in a world that is terribly broken and disordered. We see nations at war, cultures clash, families break down, individual lives are wrecked through abuse and selfish addictions, and I don't think there will be any one of us here who will go through the year untouched by some aspect of the brokenness in this world.

It affects each one of us through sickness, through death, through injustice, through suffering. But here is the good news at the end of verse 2.

In the midst of all of that, we can rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. There is a glory, there is an eternity, there is a new heaven and a new earth.

And one day, this world that we live in with all its brokenness is going to be renewed and restored. Paradise promised in all its perfection is for the believer.

And that is ours to enjoy. It is guaranteed and it is assured. This is the best life that we can ever have and it is ours to experience today.

[10:48] We have peace, we have grace, and we have hope. And the invitation here is to swim, if you like, in the fountain of the Gospel, to bathe in the pools of what we have been given.

But so often, what we can do is spend our time chasing after the dream life. To want that ideal home. To want that career.

To want that job. To want the perfect partner. And as good as they may be, they are never ever going to satisfy us. They are never going to fill us.

They are pools that are ultimately stagnant. What we are called to do is to come back to the Gospel, to experience it each day by swimming in the peace and in the grace and in the hope of God.

But before we move on, I want us to note that these things that have been promised to us can never be taken from us. Look at what it says. It is to be a present experience.

[11:55] Look at verse 1. We have peace with God. It's ours today. Through whom, verse 2, we have gained access.

We don't need to go trying to earn our access. We have it. We now stand in His grace. And present experience, we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

And the reason why this is ours today and it can never be taken and because it is secure for us is because it is all through, verse 1, our Lord Jesus Christ.

It's not dependent on us. It is all dependent on Christ who has secured it for us. These are ours today.

These are the benefits of the Gospel which can never be taken, changed, or altered. So experience the Gospel in your life.

[12:57] Well, the second thing is not only to experience the Gospel, but what we've got to learn to do is to apply the Gospel into our lives and into each situation.

Look at verse 3. not only so, not only do we have peace and grace and hope, but we also rejoice in our sufferings.

Now that's quite hard for us to take in, isn't it? To rejoice in our sufferings because I know that there are many here who do suffer and the truth is we all are going to suffer in different ways.

We've just said that we live in a world that is broken, disordered, and distorted. Not just the physical world around us, but it's our own lives that suffer.

And as we go through life, we're going to experience it in different ways. It could be physically, it could be emotionally, it could be mentally. And the last thing we feel like doing when we're in the midst of our suffering is feel like rejoicing.

[14:11] How am I supposed to rejoice with my illness? How am I to be grateful for my condition? How am I to see good in my struggles and disappointments?

Because it's telling me here that we are to rejoice in our sufferings. Well, let me make it clear that rejoicing does not mean that we jump up and down with a false smile and pretend everything is good when it's not.

No, what it does mean is that through Christ, because of our new relationship with the Lord Jesus, we can look at suffering in a different way to everybody else, which means we can rejoice about that.

We have a different perspective which does bring a joy to our lives. You've probably heard on the TV or radio one of the ads that has been produced by NRA, the National Roads Authority.

And in it, there are various people who've been affected by road traffic accidents and they explain how the accident has affected them. And in each situation, all of them say something like this, I can never accept what has happened to me.

[15:30] My life is never going to be the same. Now, while much of that is true, it's also giving the message that suffering offers us nothing.

That if you suffer, there's nothing good to come from it. It's a hopeless existence. But the gospel tells us that there is something quite different for those who suffer.

Because of the gospel, our suffering can bring about good. Look at the rest of verse 3. The reason why we can rejoice in our sufferings is because we know that our suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character, and character hope.

Let's look at those three in turn. First, suffering builds perseverance. As we journey through our life, there are going to be many times when we want to give up and give in.

The Christian life will seem to be too much of a struggle. Life will be too much of a struggle. But through suffering, we actually learn perseverance.

[16:43] We learn the ability to keep on going. Not because of our own strength, but because of our dependence and our ability to rely upon God who gives us the strength to keep going.

So suffering builds perseverance as we rest and rely and depend upon the strength and the grace of God. But not only does it build perseverance, but suffering builds character.

do you know some of the most generous and kind-hearted and loving people are those who suffer. Have you ever noticed that?

Why is it, do you think, that people who suffer the most, and we can think of people who've gone through really hard times, that they seem to be the people who care for others the most?

Why is that? Because the gospel has taught them through their suffering, has taught them qualities like patience and understanding and empathy.

[17:48] In a sense, they can say, I've been there, I've been through it, I understand, and here is a God who is going to hold you, a God who's going to keep you, a God who's never going to let you go, even when you can't even pray, and even when you don't even know what's going on.

Here is a God who is real. It builds character. But third, suffering also builds hope.

When you're fit and healthy, and life is good, and you've got a good home, and you've got a good job, and you have all your faculties, heaven and our eternal rest can seem quite irrelevant and not required.

What do I want heaven for when life is good? But as soon as suffering comes, it reminds us that we don't belong here.

Suffering increases and intensifies our longing to be at home. Suffering fuels our desire to be finished with the struggles of this world, to be released from our decaying and aging and broken bodies, and to be set free from our tortured minds.

[19:07] Suffering builds within us an anticipation and an expectation of our final home. It urges us, it gives us a greater desire for something better.

And this is what suffering does. You see, because of the gospel, we can rejoice in suffering. because it brings about good in our lives and it brings about good in the lives of others.

Well, you see, and rightly you can say it, that sounds great in theory, but how do I make what's written here a reality in my life?

How can I in my suffering rejoice? rejoice? Well, look at verse 5. He says, And hope does not disappoint us because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom He has given us.

We know that God loves us because He has proved His love for us on the cross. But what we want is to experience the same love in our life today.

[20:24] In the middle of our suffering, we don't only want to know it in our heads, but we want to feel it in our hearts. We want to know in the midst of our struggles that God loves us and that He cares for us.

And that is what the Holy Spirit does. Look at the end of verse 5. God has poured out His love into our hearts. That's to be a present experience by the Holy Spirit whom He has given us.

He takes the demonstrated love of Christ which we see on the cross and He pours it into our lives so that even in the most difficult of times, even in the midst of our suffering, we can rejoice because we are presently experiencing the love of God working in us.

a love that brings about perseverance, a love that brings about character, a love that brings about hope. So the way that we are going to experience this love, the depth of this love to see God at work in our lives is to ask the Holy Spirit to make that real for you.

He has poured His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom He has given us. If you are a Christian, you have the Holy Spirit. Ask Him to make that a reality in your life so that you learn to rejoice in your suffering.

[22:05] But the third thing we must do is not only experience the Gospel, not only are we to apply it into our lives, but we are to remember the Gospel each day.

If we are to experience it, if we are to apply it, we've got to know what it is we're experiencing, what it is we're applying. You see, it's only from the overflow of the Gospel that we find peace and grace and hope and joy.

And if we don't spend our time in the Gospel, we're never going to experience those things. So we must remind ourselves of what Christ has done.

There are two things here that we need to focus on. First, we need to focus on the cross. Verse 6. Let's read from verse 6. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, when we could do nothing for ourselves, Christ died for the ungodly.

very rarely will any person die for a righteous one. Though for a good person, someone might possibly dare to die.

[23 : 22] But God is so different. God isn't like us. God demonstrates His own love for us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

The gospel is a great leveller. It reminds us exactly what we are all like. Verse 6 tells us that we are ungodly. Verse 8 tells us we're sinners.

Down in verse 10 it describes us as being enemies. But perhaps what is most revealing is that in verse 6 it says we're powerless. That we have no ability in and of ourselves to change our relationship.

We can't give ourselves the ultimate life. we can't give ourselves the best life. We can't change ourselves because we're powerless. But God has done something for us in Christ.

Twice it tells us in that passage verse 6 that Christ died for the ungodly. In verse 8 while we're still sinners Christ died for us.

[24 : 30] He takes the initiative. He moves out to us in love. Christ in love becomes our substitute. He takes the place of us who are ungodly.

He takes the place of us the sinner and the enemy. And the wrath of God falls on Christ because he loves you and me.

And it is by trusting in his death and reminding ourselves of all that he has done that we will experience life in all its fullness. Peace, grace, hope and joy.

You've got to remember the cross. But not only the cross, we are also to focus on the resurrection. Look at verse 10. Let's read verse 10.

For if when we were God's enemies we were reconciled to him through the death of his son, how much more having been reconciled shall we be saved through his life?

[25 : 35] The fact that Christ rose from the grave is proof that we too will receive our full salvation. We have peace, we have grace, we have hope, we have joy.

These are benefits of the gospel that we can enjoy today. But the resurrection of Christ gives us assurance of our full salvation to come.

Verse 10 says, we are saved now because of his death. We are reconciled now because of his death. How much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life?

How much more there is to come for the Christian? How much more we have beyond this world? At the end when Christ comes we too will raise from the grave so that we will experience our full and final salvation.

And it is only by looking at the resurrection, reminding ourselves of what Christ has done, that we will know everything that we have to look forward to. So these are the two twin truths, the two great pillars of our faith.

[26 : 50] The cross and the resurrection. And we need to focus on them and remind ourselves of them each day. Do you remember the fountain that we talked about at the beginning?

And that big pool that fills up as the waterfall comes down? Well that pool needs to be fed otherwise it will dry up.

Unless it is filled continually it will become empty. empty. And it's exactly the same with us. Unless we are filled we will become empty.

And every time we go back to the gospel, every time we remind ourselves of what Christ has done, His cross, His resurrection, so it's like that pool fills up and up and it fills and it bubbles over and it flows over into every aspect of our life filling us with peace, with grace, with hope and with joy.

If you're feeling dry, if you're feeling empty, if you're not experiencing the gospel in your life, I encourage you to fill your life up reminding yourself daily.

[28 : 09] And if you can't do it on your own, meet with somebody else who you can read with and pray with. We're to encourage each other, remind ourselves of what we have.

If we are to experience the best life ever, and this is the best life ever, we are to immerse ourselves in the gospel.

I invite us all to swim in it every day. Don't just dip your toe into it once a week when you come along on a Sunday morning or once a month. Jump in, apply it to your life, and experience it daily and you will know the best life ever.

Let's pray together. Amen. We were once seen as ungodly sinners and enemies powerless unable to change our life or do anything but then Christ intervened he broke into our lives he died for us he rose again for us all that we could experience the best life ever we thank you for the peace that you give us thank you that we are standing in your grace thank you that we have the hope of eternity that we have joy in our suffering and we ask that by your

Holy Spirit's power that you would take these truths and apply them to our lives so that we can feel and know your love and experience the depth of what it is to be in a living and vibrant relationship with you we thank you that we have everything in Christ forgive us when we go chasing other dreams help us to chase Christ the one who gives us everything in Jesus name Amen we're going to sing together to hear move to you you you you