

The Triumphant Reign of Grace

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[0 : 00] I've stolen the lectern Bible, don't tell anyone. As I say, we're going to do things perhaps a little bit differently today intense, but what a great thing to do during June.

Just pick up the book of Romans because we're not able to kind of preach verse by verse through it. But as you, the more familiar you are with it, the more you'll see where the Apostle Paul is going, where he's coming from, and ultimately how we can know more of God through it.

And I'm going to begin just by, in some sense, doing a little bit of a recap from last week. If you were here last week, don't worry, I'm not going to go into all the details, it's okay. But the book of Romans starts off with a big picture of humanity.

And it presents to us God's plan for salvation, his plan to save us through the gospel of Jesus Christ. But as we pointed out last week, it starts off in a bad place because he points out the disorder in our world and in our lives.

And as we noted last week, we are all caught up in this sort of downward spiral. Whereas God made creation to be good, this disorder is taking us back into chaos.

[1 : 43] And so we find ourselves both to often be victims of that disorder. You know, we are harmed, we are hurt by those around us and by the systems and the failures.

But also, if we're honest, we also begin to contribute to those downward spirals and to others. We become part of the culture. And the fact is, when Paul points out some of the stuff that is not part of God's plan, some of us will go, really?

Because we're so caught up in the way just things are, in the culture that surrounds us. And Paul goes on to say that for those Gentiles he was talking to, so those who are not of Jewish ethnicity, he says, you know, they know what is right because God's made us to be that.

And yet we have been caught up in this spiral of godlessness. And then he turns to those who have the Jewish law. And these laws, he says, they give you clear standards.

But they don't do anything for you. All they do is they prove that you're lawbreakers. We actually see the things that God is pointing out.

[3 : 00] And that's part of his argument here. And as he starts writing and goes through to the third chapter, what we now call the third chapter of Romans, it's quite clear that there is no way out of this spiral of godlessness and wickedness.

Whether we are Gentile or whether we are Jew, we are all under what he calls the power of sin. Let me just read before we come to confession.

Chapter 3, verses 10 to 12. It is written, And then verse 23, And a little bit as we ended up last week, I think as we begin this, there's an opportunity just to recognise where we play our part in that picture of disorder.

And before we come to confess our sins, just a moment to consider our own part in that picture.

Now at this point, normally the minister would stand up and declare God's forgiveness.

But instead of me doing that, what I'd like to do is I'd let the Bible talk. So I'm going to invite Margaret to come now and just read the reading that's set for today, which is Romans 5, verses 1 to 11.

[4 : 53] Romans 5, verses 1 to 11. Entitled, Peace and Hope. Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.

And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character, and character hope.

And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person, someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this.

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more should we be saved from God's wrath through him?

[6 : 15] For if, while 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?

Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God. Amazing verses. Some big words.

These glorious verses from chapter 5 of Romans. Because in it contains the good news of Jesus.

And I just want to take us through it again, really.

Unpacking it. I'm not trying to do anything clever today. Therefore, since we have been justified through faith.

[7 : 16] What does it mean to be justified? It means to be declared right. A voice that says, good. You have been made right in God's eyes.

How has that happened? It's through faith. Faith. In Hebrews 11, the writer defines faith as being confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

It's a great definition of faith. It's about trust. It's about belief. It's about claiming that thing that God has sort of declared or done in heaven and bringing it into our own lives by the gift of faith.

So it's about trust. It's about belief. That is the way we access all of God's riches here for us. And so if we've been justified through faith, what do we have?

We have peace with God. So whereas before we were enemies caught in this spiral of godlessness, contributing to his anger about what was going wrong in the world, we are no longer enemies.

[8 : 24] And not that. It's not just a ceasing of enmity. No. We are connected. We are given fullness. The biblical word shalom is ours as we are justified by faith.

As we stand before God himself, our holy God, we now have peace with. And then it says, And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.

That is what we are now able to do. We are able to boast in the hope of the glory of God. What is that? Well, I spoke a couple of times now about God's kingdom, about the fact that God's kingdom is where God reigns and rules.

And we experience that kingdom both now, but not fully. Now, but not yet. Because when we come to know Jesus and we stand in that peace that he has made for us, we ourselves are born again. It's like we become a new creation. And that's just like a first taste of what we are hoping for, which is when this whole world is renewed, where as Jesus returns, the whole creation becomes what it really should be, where all the wrongs are righted, the tears are wiped away.

[9 : 51] But more than that, like a resurrection, our bodies, the creation around us will cease to creak and crack, but will give glory to God because God is fully present with us.

Just as the presence of God came into the tabernacle of the temple, we await the day when the whole creation is going to be full of God's glory. We meet him face to face.

We're fully made for what we're made for. And that's the hope we have. And so we boast in that hope because we know it's going to happen. That's what we're looking forward to.

Hope is one of these words that sometimes we think of. It's like sort of wishful thinking. Not in the Bible. Hope is the hook that we have for the future. And the more we know about what's coming, the more we can boast in it and glory in it.

And that hope is the glory of God, his presence fully amongst us, God coming home, as it were, into our world. But remarkably, it's not just a sort of future thing.

[10 : 54] that Paul says we're going to experience. He says, I'll cover the next verses in a little bit, but it says, and hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

So that future, wow, of God being present fully, his glory flowing everywhere, we can taste a bit of that because of the Holy Spirit.

It becomes like a down payment, a deposit of that future that is to come. And by his Holy Spirit, that love, that presence comes into our lives.

That is good news. And that glory means that we are glorious because we become temples of God's spirit, his very presence with us, a meeting point of humanity and God.

That's us. If we believe in Jesus, if we are justified by faith and stand in peace with him. Now, that is essentially the Christian good news.

[12:06] So if you're new to that, I hope that's clear. I hope I've explained some of these jargon words that we sometimes use. For many of us, that's not a new message. It's perhaps one we need to revisit more often in our hearts.

But many of us will be a bit stuck because our experience of life is not of the glory and the wonders and the peace. It's actually one which you might characterize by suffering.

We're still at the whim of that downward spiral where we experience illness, death, death and harm. And I think when Paul is writing to these Christians in Rome who would be no different to you and me and experience the rough and tumbles of life, in fact you might say that they're probably under more pressure as a super minority group in a Roman empire which wasn't really up for subversive movements like Christianity.

Suffering was part of their experience. Often for their faith, but for other reasons as well. And when we're caught what feels like in that downward spiral we're like, well what difference does that make? I don't feel any different. You might feel a bit different. You might have a sense of hope which does make a big difference but day to day I'm still facing death and difficult things.

[13:31] and it prevents us doesn't it having that hope it begins to fade it gets foggy because the day to day life kind of cuts in on it and starts to dim our vision of what it's about our experience is perhaps more difficult and we start to wonder don't we whether God is good.

and I think Paul has folk like us in mind as he's writing these glorious truths because he talks about suffering and as we're called to boast in the hope of the glory of God as we hold up that vision for what God has got for us his presence coming to be with us and we taste that in the Holy Spirit he says this not only so but we also glory we sort of boast in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance perseverance character and character hope and he acknowledges that suffering is difficult and he's wondering you know what it means well he's saying well no it has meaning the fact that we suffer and there's this tension between the hope that we're longing for our future destination as it were and our own experience shows us really that suffering has meaning and that it actually is working something that will bring more hope into our lives because he's working us changing our character changing our outlook and it means that suffering is not meaningless so if you live without the idea of a God and a future hope suffering is very difficult because it becomes sort of meaningless it's just

I'm just here accidentally and I'm just experiencing all this stuff whereas Paul is not shy to pull out that future hope and say look look at that and even what you're going through is working to achieve that God is working in you to build those things and you will become stronger and you will know more of God's grace in your life as a result and so if you're in that position you're thinking life's hard and this future glory feels a long way off he encourages us to do two things I think and that as I said to look forward is one angle he also encourages us to look back because if we're feeling like God's not for us we need to go to a place where we know God is for us and that's why he points us back to the cross of Jesus I'll just read verses 6 and 8 it says you see at just the right time when we were still powerless Christ died for the ungodly very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person though maybe for a good person someone might possibly dare to die but God demonstrates his love for us in this while we were still sinners

Christ died for us so he wants us to remember that if we feel there's a tension between our suffering and what's ahead for us just think about how much of a tension how much of a divide there is between the holy God and us who are caught in that downward spiral and even then even undeserving he came in the person of Jesus to die for us that's how big his love is for us that's how all embracing his love is and then his logic goes well if that's so if he did that for us then how much more will his saving work be effective and be applied to us who have faith in him I'll just read the last verse since we now have been justified by his blood Jesus' blood how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him for if while 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 not only is this so but we also boast in God through our

Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have now received reconciliation see if our lives are immersed in Jesus his story becomes ours and if we think about his sufferings as he was betrayed tortured and killed if that's his story and how that led to resurrection and to the reconciliation of the whole of creation back to God well don't you think God can use our smaller sufferings our challenges our difficulties as part of his plan for salvation there's nothing wasted in God's economy so if you your family are going through all sorts of rubbish right now Paul wants to assure you the Holy Spirit wants to assure you that there is nothing that God will not use to actually ultimately bring about a brighter hope for you and for this world because as we look to him as we look back to what Jesus did for us and we have him set for us even as we boast in him it's amazing

[18 : 58] Paul uses that word several times in the passage you know when you boast of something you just can't stop talking about hey look have you seen this it's great if we boast it encourages us to put him front and centre as we do that hope grows peace settles and love flows hope grows peace settles and love flows peace so again just take a moment to recognise where you're at with this in a moment we'll sing a song which again in some sense retells the story of what Jesus has done for us and if we believe that if we cling on to that if we put our confidence confidence in what Jesus has done for we will trust that by his Holy Spirit God is growing hope bringing greater peace into our lives and that love which may feel like a trickle at the moment from

God will flow and overflow flow so I'm just going to pause and allow the Holy Spirit some space to say what he needs to say to you to bring home this gospel this good news into your life Lord Jesus if you died for us if you were willing to get to that length whilst we were still sinners whilst we were still throwing up the muck and destruction of godlessness and wickedness if you were willing to die for us then how much more will you continue to use every part of our lives for your glory help us to cling on by faith to trust in what you've done for us to be confident that we now stand before you god father god full peace we want to receive once again that fullness from you you pour out your love into our hearts we pray amen