

Peace with God

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[0 : 0 0] Let's open the word to Romans chapter 5, verse 1 to 5. Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. Okay, so we're going to jump into Romans chapter 5, the first five verses this morning.

I do so by way of just illustration from the election. We're two months out from a federal election, and you'd have to be something really wrong if you've missed the huge election roadshow that rumbles on every single day.

Switch on the radio, the TV, it's there. It's just in front of us all the time. But here's the problem with it. In spite of a really punishing schedule of visits to electorates all around the countryside, in spite of the ongoing handshaking and baby kissing, in spite of the big promises, and equally big funding packages that seem to be tossed around at this time of the year, all of which we're told will build our nation, will create jobs, will increase our prosperity, in spite of all of that, scepticism is really widespread.

[1 : 5 7] In fact, many voters, I think it would be fair to say, regardless of which party wins the election, many voters believe there'll be no lasting or real change, no lasting benefits.

It's just more words. It's just a performance. Now, there's a similar concern that Paul, I think, is addressing as we move into chapter 5.

He's working systematically through the gospel, what it is. And as we move into chapter 5, Paul asks the question, what does the gospel actually do?

What does it actually achieve? What are the benefits of it? Now, we've got to backtrack a little bit and put that in context. So, at the start, Paul, from the start, Paul has been really excited about God's gospel.

He said it early on, that God's gospel is God's powerful way of saving people. That's Romans chapter 1, verse 16. And then, in chapter, they're bound to chapter 1 and chapter 2 and chapter 3, he made it clear that unrighteousness or failure to live in the light of what we know about God means that every single person who's ever lived actually needs the gospel, desperately needs the gospel.

[3 : 1 5] There's God's righteousness or holiness, and against that, our unrighteousness or rebellion or sinfulness. We need the gospel. The picture gets bigger and bigger and bigger.

And then, in chapter 3 and chapter 4, he's spelled out in detail what the gospel is. We fall short of God's glory and we're overcome with God's glory as we're saved in Christ.

And he tends to spell out in chapter 4 exactly how individual believers receive the gospel, the benefits of the gospel, or receive God's salvation. And now, in chapter 5 through to 8, he moves into the next section, which is a really positive section, and he's going to spell out one by one the benefits of the gospel, what it actually achieves, what the results of it are, what it actually does. And it's like building blocks, just putting them one on top of the other to step up and up and up just to see how amazing these benefits are that come to us in the gospel.

So we're going to jump into it this morning just in five verses. In short, as I want to introduce these three chapters, then in short, what does the gospel achieve? Well, the gospel means a radical change in the way God views us, in the way God treats us.

[4 : 37] I'll say that again. The gospel means a radical change in the way God views us and treats us. So in Jesus, as we move into verse 1 of chapter 5 here, in Jesus, the first radical change in the way God views us and treats us is that we have a new standing.

A new standing in which peace defines relationship with God. Now those of you who know history or were old enough to remember, World War II ended formally with a very, very simple radio announcement.

and it said this, hostilities are over and we are now at peace. It sort of, in one sense, jars against the five years that led to that, the millions that died, the destruction.

but there it was. Hostilities are over and we are now at peace. Folk had known the awfulness of war for so long.

Indeed, folk had known that the war was unavoidable. but still, they longed for peace. And can I say that they've longed for peace as only those who've experienced war can long for it.

[6 : 19] It's something that probably my generation, well maybe because I come from Ireland is a little bit different, but generally speaking, people my age have not experienced anything except peace. So we don't know what it is to long for peace.

How do you think Ukrainians or many in Russia would be thinking this morning as they long for peace? Or many other parts around the world. But here it is.

They've longed for it and here it is at last as they heard that radio announcement. And of course, it brought such tremendous joy to people that countless tens of thousands of people just went into the streets dancing and singing and hugging and kissing.

That's what peace does in contrast to war. And now you can understand people thinking well now relationships will be defined and governed by peace rather than war.

the horror of war being replaced by peace. I think that's what Paul's talking about here. I'm trying to build up the picture so we can actually feel it emotionally.

[7 : 41] In verse 1, therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. friends, the immediate benefit, the first tab off the rank in terms of what the gospel achieves is peace with God.

Hostility from God is a thing of the past in respect of his people. But we actually need to do a little bit of work so we're clear about what peace with God means because the whole concept of peace with God has been pretty well sabotaged in our day and age.

When you talk about peace or peace with God, I think for many it would simply be reduced to how they feel about God.

and the process would work therefore something like this. I don't actually feel any animosity towards God. I've never ever felt any animosity towards God and I even have an inner sense of calm when I think about God.

And so therefore, what are you talking about? I don't believe there's ever been a problem in the relationship. In fact, I would venture to say that I've always been at peace with God.

[9 : 12] You see the danger of that thing? It's about how I feel towards God. But you see, our own experiences in life should make us a little bit cautious.

I think most of us will experience the shock of discovering that a relationship we thought was peaceful and working well was actually seriously broken.

It's just that we didn't know about it and that the other party in the relationship was actually really hostile to us, was at war with us. Have you been there, discovered that sort of thing? It's a shocking thing to discover.

No amount of pretending a relationship is peaceful and functioning well matters if the other person, the other party to the relationship is not of the same mind.

I can feel really warm and fuzzy towards them, but if they're not warm and fuzzy towards me, then the relationship doesn't work. So, verse 1.

[10 : 25] The focus here for Paul is not on how I feel about God, but far more importantly, it's about how God feels about me.

That's what we want to know about. And the verse then says, therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

In Jesus, hostility has been brought to an end. There is no more hostility from God towards me in my unrighteousness, my sin, my rebellion.

He spoke about in chapters 1 and 2. Why not? Because of what Jesus has done for me. peace with God is tied to the death of Christ and is the direct result of being justified by grace alone through faith alone.

So, my friends, the gospel actually changes the standing or the way God views his special people. The gospel means that God is reconciled to me.

[11 : 41] Where once I was pushed away to arm's length, alienated from God, and God alienated from me because of my unrighteousness, he's now brought me back.

He's now reconciled himself to me through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Again, let me just try an illustration.

I'm just keen to try and get us to feel this, the power of this. It's familiar words, but I deal with it every day of the week where people can't just grasp it practically.

Three weeks ago, Russia began hostilities in Ukraine. Now, as we ponder that, we know that Ukrainians don't want hostility and war with Russia.

And what do we have to say? Well, that matters little. It matters little that Ukrainians don't want hostilities because superpower Russia has declared war.

[12 : 52] So what's the only hope of peace, realistically? Well, it will be if superpower Russia decides at some point that the grievances or whatever the issues were that caused the hostilities in the first place, have been satisfied.

My friends, the superpower, whether we like it or not, holds the key to peace. So go back to my Second World War illustration.

Christ's death, as it were, then, is God's radio announcement that the state of war, which is holiness or righteousness, caused him to declare in response to our unrighteousness, our unholiness, our sinful rebellion, is now over.

The superpower, God, the righteous God, declared war, as it were, declared hostility against our unrighteousness, and he now has declared peace.

Why can he now declare peace? Because we are justified, we are put right with him through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. The righteous God is reconciled to his people.

[14 : 17] The cause of alienation and war is gone completely and forever. no longer are God's people the target of his anger, but peace means we are the recipients of his love and blessing.

No longer is there tension and alienation in the relationship between God and people. Now there is only peace and closeness and enjoyment and stability.

Now friends, this might seem to be an understated application, but I think it's really important. Increasingly, I think it's really important. We so often fail to appreciate what a great benefit we get from Christ's death at a practical level.

Yes, we can work through the theological theory, but when it comes to being on the ground, living with our sin, living with ourselves on a daily basis, so often we fail to appreciate the benefit we have in Christ.

[15 : 31] Often we're ho-hum and matter-of-fact rather than amazed and full of praise and secure. Why? Why might that be?

Well, because the notion of personally recognizing and owning my sin or unrighteousness or rebellion against God and the severe consequences this brings in terms of God's just condemnation is not something I or we find pleasant or easy, especially in our world where constantly we're being told, actually, people are really good at heart.

so if I fudge that part of the equation, then it makes sense that the other part of the equation, what God has done for me in Jesus is no big deal.

So, God's holy or just or righteous character is too hard for us to bear and so we try to dumb it down and we rob ourselves therefore of the joy and the praise that should flow to us when we see the massive gap, opening up the massive gap and then see how that massive gap is bridged an incredible cost to the Lord in the death of his son.

So, on the one hand, you see, either we tend to view God as sort of that heavenly grandfather whose job is to spoil us, giving us whatever we want regardless of our most obnoxious behavior.

[17 : 22] That's what I think grandfathers are sometimes expected to do. Or, alternatively, we think of God as constantly cranky and unpleasant to be around.

Maybe he's still a grandfather figure, maybe that's coming closer to home for me. We tend to think of God as being constantly cranky and unpleasant to be around. And so we try to have as little to do

with God as possible.

again, it just dumbs down and blurs that which should be really sharp.

Advertisers, for example, know the power of before and after. It's used constantly in advertising. So you've got the drab person with drab hair, dandruff.

Why is this drab person so bad? Because they haven't used Pantene Pro-V. And three days worth of using that and this person is totally renewed. The pitch, and it works, we can laugh at it, but it really works, is the before and after.

[18 : 32] Friends, as Christians, we must keep reminding ourselves of the before and after picture. Before, hostility.

Wrath, righteous condemnation for our unrighteousness. Now, peace, joy, stability.

The connection with the two in Christ. If we forget this contrast and this great blessing of peace with God, we won't be stirred to praise and thankful obedience.

It's that simple. The second thing then is, the second benefit is a new intimacy and privilege, what I'm calling unrestricted access to God.

Now, peace was declared by God. That's a legal process. God declared peace, a judicial process. peace. Now, when a judge acquits a criminal in our justice system, there's absolutely no expectation of ongoing relationship between the judge and the person acquitted.

[19 : 50] God acquits his people, not only does he change his view of us judicially, but there's actually ongoing personal benefit, the benefit of intimate personal relationship and immense privilege.

Look at verse 2. Do you see that? We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him, we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand.

We have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand. Now, what does that mean?

Well, I think it means this. We're all familiar with the notion of security clearances. Well, I think what it's saying here is that we, in Christ, we are issued with the highest level security clearance in terms of rock concerts.

It's an access all areas pass. It means when you flash that thing that hangs around your neck on a lanyard, it tells people that you have a right to be there.

[21 : 17] You belong there. In the presence of God himself, displaying our right now in Christ to be in God's presence for all eternity.

God's God's presence.

So again, an illustration, I think this might do it, but if not, try and come up with your own illustration. Don't trip over my failures. In days past, when a person was, and I'm talking many generations ago, when a person was invited to a party, put on by some dignitary, you'd be brought into the ballroom and you would stop and somebody would formally announce you.

They would call out your name so as everybody would hear that Mr. and Mrs. Calderwood were here by invitation of the host and by that invitation are entitled to all household privileges.

as I came to Christ, as I was brought to Christ by God's grace, I was brought into the throne room of God by Christ and formally announced to the Heavenly Father as one being the recipient of the benefits of his death and therefore entitled to all the blessings of God's grace.

[23 : 11] Imagine that. Imagine being entitled to all the blessings of God's grace and having the confidence to look for them.

See, that's much more than just permission to be in God's presence. God's presence. That's the invitation to come into God's presence and fill the space that's been given you and enjoy the space that's been given you in God's presence.

Dare I say, it's to act as if you ought to be there. Some years ago I was down in Adelaide and kids, our four children had a choice of going with Alison shopping or coming with me to try and get into the South Australian cricket ground.

We didn't have tickets and I said, look, just follow me, kids, don't look up, just look as if you own the place. And that got us in through the first couple of gates, but then finally a security guard accosted us.

But by then it was too late because there was actually no way out, we were stuck. And at that point I used my I'm Irish, that didn't work. I even used my I'm Irish and from the country and that didn't work.

[24 : 28] We were escorted out of the ground and my kids were still laughing at me weeks later. The point is I pretended at that point to look as if I should have been there.

It didn't work, not for very long. But in Christ, as it were, if you can just picture this and it'll come with me in the picture, in Christ I can wander around the courts of heaven in the presence of God himself, knowing I have the right to be there, not by my own merit, but by Christ.

And I can claim those benefits every single day in my daily work with Christ. That's some blessing, isn't it? Being treated in grace is generously receiving the opposite of what I deserve.

What a great blessing that you and me as sinful people have, through Christ, been brought to God who declared that we will forever share the blessings of his grace and favor fully and without reserve.

[25 : 53] During the Vietnam War, there were hundreds of little children who had no families. They used to follow the soldiers around and beg to be taken home with them.

And it's a great joy to read history that many American soldiers and Australian soldiers did just that. These little children were lost.

They had no place to belong, nobody to care for them. And many of these GIs took them home and adopted them into their families. Adopted hopeless children and gave them a new home and security.

My friends, being given access into grace is being adopted into God's own family.

And given the security and privileges of that family forever. Now the question is, again, do you see the privilege that is yours as a Christian?

[27 : 13] Do you fill your mind with pictures to help you appreciate what this means?

Do you really believe that in Christ you're God's adopted child and that he will protect you and keep you and love you and provide for your every need and never abandon you?

Do you know yourself to be held firmly and tenderly in your father's arms?

Just like a father embraces his child and calms their fears. Do you understand that he loves you?

That he'll only do what's good for you. Do you? Do you? Do you? Do you? Do you? Do you? Do you? Do you? And he'll only keep on doing that for eternity.

[28 : 23] Well, the final point, we're almost finished. New standing, new intimacy and privilege and a new orientation bound for glory.

So I said at the start, these benefits are like just giant building blocks. The benefits of the benefits of the gospel are piled up one on top of the other. We climb onto one to access the next one and fully understand the next one.

We have a new standing with God. And we're actually adopted into God's family and enjoy all its privileges. But most amazing of all, we're bound for glory.

Which means that we will actually be made like Jesus. Verse 2 again.

Second half of verse 2. We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

[29 : 26] Remember back in chapter 3, verse 23, it said we've all fallen short of the glory of God. Now we're back in contact with it again.

In Christ. Now the word hope is not like we use it these days, as Don mentioned in his children's talk. It's not some vague hope or wish. Here it's a conviction, a certainty, a reality.

There's nothing uncertain about it. So it would help us if we change that word. We rejoice in the certainty of experiencing the glory of God.

What is that? Well, I've already said in chapter 3, verse 23, sin meant we fall short of God's glory or character of righteousness.

That's what Bo talked about a few weeks ago. God's glory is God's character of righteousness. We fall miserably short of that in our own abilities. And the gospel means we regain that which was lost.

[30 : 34] Hope of glory is that we will be with God and that we will be like him. Paul mentions this in Philippians chapter 3.

Just listen to Philippians chapter 3, verse 20 and 21. Paul says this, So going back to the adoption idea again, children who are adopted into a family invariably begin to develop the characteristics of the family that they live with.

I remember in time when people laughed at me endlessly because I said this particular little boy was starting to look like his father. His father was white Anglo-Saxon. This little boy was Negroed. But I had just seen them over years. And I had stopped saying color or anything else. He just started to look like his father in my eyes. He was an adopted boy, by the way. I should have told you that was part of the story, I suppose. Children who are adopted into a family invariably began to develop the characteristics of that family. [32 : 07] And this is exactly what happens to those who are in Christ's family. Christ's spirit works in us, renovating us little by little from the inside out to become like Jesus.

You might be saying by this stage, But what about all the trials and the hard circumstances I experience? Surely the reality of life as a Christian is that tough circumstances and my own failings and my experiences are more likely to destroy me than to see me become like Christ. Well, not so, according to Paul in verses 3 and 4. So he says, We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. More than that, Get that?

More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings. Knowing that suffering produces endurance, And endurance produces character, And character produces hope, And hope does not put us to shame, Because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, Who has been given to us.

In Christ, As Christians, We are bound for glory. Nothing will stop us from getting there. [33 : 32] So what about these hard circumstances? What about our experiences? Well, says Paul, These very experiences, Sometimes painful, Enormously difficult, Will be the means by which We become more and more Like our Lord.

So here's the rub for us. Glory is certain, But there's no promise of an easy, Hassle-free ride. I like a neat yard at home. But to achieve that neat yard, I have to mow the lawn, I have to dig out weeds, And I have to keep the edges trimmed, And I have to keep the fences in tight. Which interestingly, All of which I hate doing. But I do them, Because of what it produces. It's the same here with Paul. Being like Christ is the end point. But the process involves dealing with All sorts of painful and frustrating And disappointing circumstances along the way. [34 : 49] And when we can see this link, Then we can actually find a place And a way to view our circumstances, Painful and difficult as they are, As a means to an end.

The end which we long for, Therefore we can find a way to joy In our sufferings. So it's not that we enjoy suffering For suffering's sake.

That's masochism. That's unbiblical. We rejoice in what suffering produces. Nobody thinks an illness Or a broken relationship is wonderful.

But, I've heard repeatedly over my years, And I've said it myself, If this is the means by which I am brought To a more Christ-likeness, Then it's been a worthwhile, Though painful, Process. Friends, Friends, Again, Too often our desire for relief From our circumstances Has a greater priority Than our desire To grow to be like Christ.

[36 : 09] Put simply, We would choose a hassle-free life. This is what I've found myself doing So many times over my years. I would prefer to choose a hassle-free life Than to choose circumstances That I know Will push me into new levels of godliness.

How short-sighted am I? Hopefully you're not that short-sighted. And so often that very thing Is reflected in our prayers, Isn't it?

Give me relief, Lord. Brown, Give me an ability to trust you. Friends, What great blessing, We'll see more over the next two weeks, What great blessings come to us in the gospel.

But behind those great blessings, Then we have to say, What a great God. The God of the gospel. So I'll just leave you with this thought, Asking that, And hoping and praying That his honour and glory Will be your desire.

Your whole desire In this coming week. If we have any understanding Of the significance of peace And the price at which it was purchased for us, If we have any concept of the intimacy And privilege that we now have in Christ, And if we have any longing For the glory that's developing in us now, And will one be completed, Then, Surely we live every day for the Lord.

[37 : 55] Surely, If we understand what he's done for us And is doing in us, Then we will be people Who reflect his righteousness And who want to honour his name.

Join me in prayer. Lord, these are so lofty, These blessings, So amazing, And yet, We struggle, Lord, At least I struggle, To speak about them in a way That just takes our breath away.

I pray, Lord, That your spirit might Take us into your word Again, In our minds, And help us just to see What blessing it is to say, Since we have been justified by faith, We have peace with you. Help us to live, Lord, As those who enjoy peace, And help us, Lord, To live, therefore, As those who want to be Peacemakers, As we'll see more of next week.
I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.