

# Loved forever

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[ 0 : 00 ] Romans chapter 5, we're going to be reading from verse 1 through to 11. 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, 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. For while we were weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

For one will scarcely die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die. But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

[ 1 : 39 ] More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

I want to begin this morning with a quotation from John Dixon, whose name will be familiar to most of you, but part of a bigger section I printed in the bulletin this week, or prepared for the bulletin. So just listen up as I read it to you. John Dixon says this, Early in my Christian life, I was quite blown away by the thought of God's love.

But then things fell apart, and suddenly I had to confront one of the biggest problems in my Christian life. Did God love me after all?

Struggling to be committed to God, I had this dark cloud hanging over me. It was horrible. For months and months, I felt guilt and doubt, more guilt, greater doubt, even more guilt.

[ 2 : 52 ] I remember crying out to God a number of times, Why don't you love me? As I meet more and more Christians in my travels, I'm realizing that my experience back then was quite common.

Many of God's people get caught in a trap where they lose sight of God's love for them in Christ. Friends, I suspect this same dark cloud has settled on all of us here this morning, at some time or other.

I definitely know it sits heavily on some believers listening in this morning. And it's a black cloud. Well, I want to tell you this morning that Paul's letters to the Christians at Rome is crafted especially for you, if you're in that situation.

Because as Paul addresses their questions and struggles in the way he structures the letter, he actually anticipated your questions and struggles and my questions and struggles.

[ 4 : 12 ] So let's do some revision and see this. Beck's already sort of done some revision for us this morning. That's been helpful. So we look at chapters 1 to 4. Paul begins where all believers begin.

Chapter 1, verse 16. Incredible excitement about God's powerful gospel. God's powerful way to save sinners. We've understood our desperate need for the gospel of Jesus because we recognize that our unrighteousness or our failure to live in the light of what we knew about God meant we were under his wrath, under his condemnation.

We were in big trouble. Then we've delighted to discover that God has provided an alternative pathway to righteousness through Jesus who has done for us that which we could never do for ourselves.

Dealt with our sin and made us acceptable to God. Brought us back into relationship with God. And all this simply by faith or by taking God at his word or taking God's promises at face value.

It's quite a remarkable story. We've been there as Christians. We've experienced it. We've loved it. But then the fears and doubts start.

[ 5 : 42 ] We look at our failures on any given day, any given week, and we start to ask, well, can I be sure that given my ongoing failures, can I be sure that God just won't get tired of me?

Can I be sure that I just won't, as it were, wear out his love, exhausted? Can I be sure he won't drop me in frustration?

Dare I think? Can I be sure he won't drop me in anger? And despair? Can I be sure I will not crash and burn as I struggle on any given day to serve God and be the person I want to be in response to my heavenly father's grace and my life?

And that takes us into chapter 5 then. And this is exactly, that dilemma is exactly what Paul addresses. And he does that by listing one after the other.

I said last week, he piles them up one upon the other. The benefits or guarantee or security of being justified, of being declared to be back in relationship with God.

[ 6 : 56 ] Last Sunday, we started in chapter 5, we explored some immediate benefits. We said last week that the gospel means a radical change in the way God views us.

In Jesus, we have a new standing. So now the relationship is defined by peace. No longer is there any hostility in it.

There's new intimacy and privilege. God actually adopts us into his own family. He gives us unrestricted access to himself. And we have unrestricted access to the privileges and blessings of the Lord Jesus.

And we have a new orientation. We're now bound for glory instead of bound for condemnation.

Bound for glory with the prospect of being with Jesus in heaven and being like Jesus.

Bound for glory with the Lord Jesus. Bound for glory with the Lord Jesus. Bound for glory with the Lord Jesus. And it's in that context, so in verse 4 last week, that we can actually appreciate difficult and painful circumstances as they come to us.

[ 8 : 04 ] Knowing they are what God uses to draw us closer to himself. To make us more like himself. And the process here becomes a cycle, a pattern that's self-affirming.

The more we see that happening, the more we experience these painful circumstances, the more we see ourselves developing that character, that Christ-like character that we so long for.

Which confirms that the hope of glory is real. Little by little, we're moving towards it. Because that's what God promised. Well, this morning we continue to explore the gospel benefits listed in verses 5 to 11.

And these benefits, I think, address our deepest fears. And they give gospel guarantee that in spite of daily struggle, in spite of constant failures, we will make it home to heaven to experience glory or the fullness of our hope.

My friends, God will finish what he has started by bringing us into good relationship with himself. He will bring us home to heaven and make us like him.

[ 9 : 34 ] Now, what's the basis of that guarantee or certainty or security? Well, in verses 5 to 8 we say that God has already proved his forever love for you.

Now, I mentioned last week that God actually adopts us into his family. Well, I want to say a little bit more about that now. Because parents who adopt a child then go to great lengths to help their adopted child be loved and secure in their new family relationship.

They consciously work hard at it. They know the background of that child. They want their adopted child to sense an inner commitment and deep affection which is unbreakable.

They want that child to know that never again will they be abandoned. And they want to reinforce that inner conviction with outward practical demonstrations of their affection and commitment.

Well, that's exactly what God has done for you and me, his adopted children. He actually proves or confirms and reinforces the reality of his unconditional, unchanging, unfading love.

[ 11 : 07 ] He does it first by inner confirmation of the Holy Spirit. Look at verse 5. Hope never puts us to shame or will never disappoint us.

Because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. That's a very powerful picture word there, isn't it?

God's love has been poured. Great bucketfuls of God's love has just been poured in till we're filled to the brim. That's the picture.

That's the picture. That's the picture. That's the picture. God has put his spirit in us. And one of his jobs, one of his Holy Spirit's jobs, is to pour a sense of God's love into our hearts.

Filling us to the brim, as I say, so that we're vividly and inwardly aware that God loves us. That there's an unbreakable bond that is so totally committed to us as his saved children.

[12:17] Ephesians chapter 1, verse 13 to 14. You can go and check it out for yourself. And Paul describes there that the Holy Spirit, the presence and changing activity within us, as God's deposit and guarantee on his salvation contract.

So the deposit and guarantee is like a contract language. Like you're buying a house that the purchase is secured when the deposit's paid and the contract's signed. Well, the Holy Spirit is God's deposit and guarantee of his salvation contract or promise.

What promise? That we will be loved forever. And that all his blessings will come.

In other words, to use the word here, hope of glory. In John chapter 6, 8 to 13, the apostle John uses a different description.

He describes how God's spirit is constantly working in his saved people to create conviction of sin and truth. And from this, says John, confidence of being in God's family and bound for glory.

[13:33] Now that's a bit more strange to us, I think, because it's not really how we normally think of God convicting us and giving us assurance. But here's how it works.

I want you to ask yourself, just go back in your mind, just quickly go back in your mind. Why is it that you're now so very worried about your sin when you weren't worried about it before you become a Christian?

Why? Answer. Because God's spirit is working within you to make you like God.

And he does that by helping you see the things that God hates so that you also hate them, and I also hate them, and helping you see the things that God loves and wants.

So that we also want those things. See how character develops? Proven character.

[14:42] You're concerned, my friend, about your sin. Hear this really, really careful, because I think we don't hear it. Your concern about your sin is evidence that you have God's spirit already working in you, and evidence of God's forever love.

You see, we often rob ourselves of this benefit. And it's a wonderful benefit that we rob ourselves of it, because we actually assume that when we experience God's spirit working within us, it will be a warm, fuzzy feeling.

And peace will just be dreamy and hassle-free. Living. But that's not what the Bible tells us. I mean, there will be times like that.

But given our sinfulness, it's not going to be predominantly that. In fact, it may be anything but that. The reality is that conviction of truth and sin is hard.

It's painful. I don't like to on my sin. I don't like to admit that I'm capable of that, even while I say this about the Lord Jesus. So conviction of sin, by the Holy Spirit in my life, needs to be painful, because I'm a slow, reluctant learner.

[16:07] It's painful to face. It's harder to act on. But it's nonetheless testimony to God's love, having been poured into your life in great back-ups, that God pursues you so that you do see your sin, so that you do come to hate it, and that you do want to do something about it and seek God's character in your life.

Or again, some might say more positively than Eeyore up here, does it? Ask yourself, what of that time when suddenly a promise from God, just when you're reading the Bible, suddenly a verse or a promise leaps out at you.

You've read it dozens of times, and yet you think, hang on a sec, I've never seen that before. I've never registered that before. I've never been able to apply it to myself in a way before.

Perhaps it showcases the Lord Jesus in a way you hadn't seen him before, or showcases the love of the Father, or showcases your own sin in a way you hadn't seen it before, or does something that deepens your longing for heaven and affection for Christ.

Well, my friends, again, this is the hidden persuasion of God through the Holy Spirit, which floods our hearts. That's the picture.

[17:33] It just sweeps over you like a flash flood. Making us profoundly grateful for God's grace, and giving us confidence in God's promises of glory to come, even in hard times, and in the midst of our failures.

Go back to verse 5 again. Ask for verse 5. Hope does not put us to shame.

God says, I promise you will experience glory. We will never be disappointed by God's promise, because he has reinforced that promise by pouring, putting the Holy Spirit within us, to pour his love into our hearts on a daily basis.

As I said before, great bucketfuls of God's love. Just topping up, because it leaks out in the way we think about life, and experience life. Always topped up, never disappointing us.

Well, the second way in which God operates is by outward demonstration, verses 6 to 8. Now, we all know the saying. I've heard it many times from Alison in my marriage, to my shame.

[ 19 : 02 ] Don't just say you love me. Show you love me. So, what does God's actions demonstrate about the nature and extent of his love for his people?

Well, verses 6 through to 8. While we were still weak, at the right time, or the most judicious time, Christ died for the ungodly.

one would scarcely die for a righteous person. That's a person who had something going for them that was really worthwhile dying for. Though, perhaps, for a reasonable person, one would dare even to die.

But God shows his love for us in this, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. My friends, in that sentence, we're told that God's love was all in.

born and expressed an incredible cost to himself. Even more amazing, it was a totally unique love.

[ 20 : 25 ] As the picture gives us here, we are highly unlikely to give up our life for someone we thought had lots going for them.

Let alone a down and out living under some bridge or some serial rapist or murderer. But God acts to love and save those who are totally offensive to him.

Who have nothing at all to commend themselves to him. Just look at these verses and see how God viewed us before he poured his love onto us.

We were powerless. It's a strange word because at the same time, we were aggressively committed. We were powerless. And yet we were aggressively committed to treating God with indifference or veiled contempt.

That was at best. And at worst, just treating God as an enemy. Ignoring. Rejecting. Despising his authority. Despising that he described and defined and offered to us as the good life.

[ 21 : 47 ] In response, verse 10, God declared us to be his enemies. Those with whom he would have nothing to do except hostility.

What sort of God would love people like you and me who are so unlovely, so undeserving, so horrible in the way that we treated him before we were converted.

And all the while, like Nemo, being totally oblivious to the predicament we were in. And we're told here that knowing all of this, knowing the very worst about us, Jesus died for the likes of you and me.

That's a pretty strong demonstration of love. Friends, God has proved the nature and extent of his love for you as Jesus went to the cross.

And since his commitment to you was made initially, knowing the worst about you, then he's not going to change his mind about you.

[ 23 : 28 ] It's not as if we get into the relationship a couple of years and he thinks, oh, blimey, Charlie, if I'd known then what I know now about Calderwood, I would never have started this relationship. That's how everybody else reacts to me.

But not the Lord, thankfully. He knew the worst about me when he committed to me. He's not going to change his mind. Nothing draws a loving response from a wife more than when a husband leads off with a selfless, constant, costly, unconditional love.

So my friends, I say to you this morning, if anything, if anything will find your trust in God, your desire for God, your delight in God, then surely understanding something of the nature and extent of God's love will be it.

So the second part of our certainty or guarantee of getting your glory is that if you're a Christian, then God's already done the hard part.

The rest is easy. Picking up verses 9 to 11. If you see a high jumper clearing the bar at 2 metres, then you've got pretty great confidence that he'll be able to clear the bar at 300 mils.

[ 25 : 14 ] In other words, having achieved the much harder task, the easier is just a matter of course. And that's exactly what Paul's argument is in verses 9 to 11.

Since God has already at great cost reconciled his enemies, then there is no doubt whatsoever that he will keep his friends.

Since he has reconciled his enemies, that he has made his enemies into his friends, then there is no doubt that he will actually keep those friends as friends. since he's already done the much harder work of dealing with our sin, adopting us into his family with unrestricted privilege and blessing, how much more will he do the easier part of bringing his renewed people home to glory? him. How do we know that for sure? Well, go back again to Jesus. It's all about Jesus. Because of Christ's death, Jesus died for us.

Jesus paid the penalty for our sins. that, we've already seen in the early chapters, removed all causes of hostility on God's part, enabling him to accept me just as if I'd justified, just as if I'd never ever sinned.

[ 26 : 46 ] The benefit of Christ's death in the past, which you and I as Christians currently enjoy, is also the guarantee that we will make it to heaven.

So it's Christ's death, but it's also because of Christ's life, verse 10. For if while we were enemies were reconciled to God by the death of his son, much more now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

life? The fact that Christ rose from the dead and is now alive in heaven is proof that his death was sufficient to deal with all the sin and penalty due to, sorry, all the sin, all the penalty of the sin due to his people, and evidence that all God's wrath has been dealt with and soaked up, never more to be seen in the relationship.

In other words, if soaking up God's anger and paying the penalty for sin was why Jesus died, then the fact that he was resurrected or he came back from the dead shows that all that wrath, all that sin has been dealt with, and there's no reason therefore for Jesus to stay dead as it were.

His resurrection is proof that he achieved what he intended to achieve in his death, that is, the reconciliation of his enemies, turning his enemies into friends, bringing them into his family, his adopted children.

[ 28 : 35 ] But even more, his presence before God with the marks of death and the cross still in his body is actually a visible reminder to God that all his people that have been bought back, and restored to family membership and family privilege.

Friends, I hope you can say something of the assurance that is ours as Christ believing people. This is just not sentimental optimism.

This is fact, this is logic. this is the statement of God himself. Any problem we have with a lack of assurance is usually of our own making, not because God has done something that is uncertain. And here's what I think the problem is. Too often we focus on the death of Christ, Christ. And that's a good thing to focus on because we know that on the death of Christ we have entered into good relationship with God.

But too often also we forget about the ongoing life of Jesus, his resurrection life in heaven, which guarantees that what God started back there at the cross will be completed in the future in glory, in heaven.

[ 30 : 12 ] We need to remind ourselves that since God has done the hardest thing in changing us from enemies into family members through the death of Christ, then the easiest part is it where of Jesus reminding the Father that all his people have been secured and the job of keeping us to heaven will also happen.

So here's the problem in a nutshell. we often think separately about our being justified and our being glorified or brought to heaven and made like Jesus.

See, we separate what God keeps together inseparably. Justification ends in glorification. It's not justification then you're left on your own whether you're good or bad or indifferent.

Justification means glorification. He will never do one without the other in your life. In fact, if you're a believer, you can say with confidence that having done one, he will do the other.

peace, peace, adoption into his family, the enjoyment of all the privileges that are Jesus's, the certainty of being with Jesus, being like Jesus, and all this demonstrated and constantly reaffirmed as God pours his love into us on a daily basis by the Holy Spirit and demonstrated his love for us in Jesus.

[ 31 : 59 ] All that demonstrates God's unconditional forever committed love for us. Friends, it's a bit of a cliché but I tell you, it doesn't get any better than that.

Join me in prayer. It really doesn't get any better than that. Lord, we struggle even to articulate it. We struggle even more to make sure we keep on experiencing it. We just find it so hard to take you at your word. We keep separating that which you have put together. It's as if we think we've been brought back into good relationship with you and then you leave us flailing around in our own devices and our own resources. But Lord, help us to see that what you start, you finish. You've justified us and you will glorify us. You've called us to yourself here in this world and you will call us home to yourself in heaven. Help us to believe that.

[ 33 : 06 ] Help us to delight in you because of it. Help us to be safe and secure in it. in Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Thank you very much.