

The Incomparable Blessings of Justification

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[0 : 0 0] Well, hello there, everyone. My name is Mark, and let me extend my welcome to you if you've joined us tonight. It's a pleasure to be with you and to go through God's Word together.

I hope for those of us living in Melbourne that you've had an okay week, probably trying to survive or get through stage four. But I hope that the joy of the Lord has been with you and that you've been able to give thanks to God even for small mercies like, for example, the weather today has been great. It's just good to be able to thank God for that and to realize that He's still with us by His Spirit. Well, let's get into Romans chapter 5. If you've got your Bibles there, do open it to that passage which was read earlier. Probably doesn't happen very often to us, but once in a while we get a gift in life that we don't expect, like a really big and unexpected one. Say, for example, you check into a hotel and being economical, like me, you book the most basic room. No windows, just tiny bathroom, way down the back of the hotel. But then the hotel decides to give you an upgrade to the presidential suite, no less.

So what happens when you arrive at the suite? You tip the porter, of course, he's carried your bags even though you maybe didn't really want to. But then what next? Well, we check out this unexpected gift, don't we? You know, we jump on the comfy bed, step out into the balcony, which is bigger than the original room that you booked. You soak in the amazing scenery from the rooftop, turn on the jacuzzi, try the surround sound, home entertainment system, check out all the goodies in the bar. Now, of course, I'm saying all this hypothetically because nothing like that has ever happened to me. But that's what I imagine I would be doing.

And I'm sure you would probably do the same, right? Well, we're at the point in Romans where this has just happened to us spiritually. Paul says in Romans 5, verse 1, 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.

We've just been given access to God through Christ. This is our presidential suite, if you like, spiritually. And not because we've earned it, but it's the gift of grace. Because we've been justified by faith, made right with God, we have this peace with God now. Paul says that this peace, well, it's not a subjective peace or state of mind or feeling. Rather, it's the position of those who have averted God's wrath. We're no longer at war with Him, nor He with us. We're at peace with Him.

[3 : 1 1] And with that peace, we gain access to God, into the grace where we now stand, Paul says. It's from here, then, that Paul gives us a brief tour of our newfound blessed relationship with God.

Paul mentions three blessings, I think, here. That of hope, of sufferings, which at first doesn't sound much like a blessing, and then finally of God. In fact, Paul doesn't quite use the word blessing here, but he uses the word boasting. So in verse 2, which is on your slide, we boast in the glory, in the hope of glory of God. Not only so, we also glory, but that's still a same word as boast, in our sufferings. And then right at the end, in verse 11 again, we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ. And so I've structured our sermon or the talk tonight according to those three boastings. Notice as well that these boastings are tied together by that same phrase. In verse 3, Paul says, not only so. And then in verse 11, not only is this so.

Now this theme of boasting follows on from earlier chapters. So if you remember in Romans chapter 3, in verse 27, Paul asks, where then is boasting? Well, for those who are justified by faith, it is excluded.

And again, in speaking of Abraham last week, in chapter 4 and verse 2, he said, if in fact Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about, but not before God. But then now, having been told that there's no place for boasting, Paul plays on this idea that if boasting is required, then let's boast in our hope, sufferings, and God. Or to use the other word in this passage, let's glory in

them.

But it's a rather counterintuitive type of boasting, isn't it? Because they're not things you normally think of to boast about. You see, we boast in things that we're proud of, rather like a parent constantly telling their friends about his daughter's achievements, like her first piano recital at school, or the medal she's won, even though other people get tired of it. We keep saying, we keep talking about it, don't we? Why? Because those are the things that make us proud as parents.

[5 : 45] Likewise, to boast in hope, sufferings, and God is to be saying to people, hey, put your faith in Jesus, because these are the things, these are the things that we get from it. That's the only way to get them, by putting your faith in Jesus. But unlike normal boasting, these things don't sound all that impressive to begin with, do they? Yet Paul insists that these are the boasts of a Christian.

Now, why is that? Well, we're going to start taking a look at the first one to see. So, verse 2, we've already read, we boast in the hope of the glory of God, point 1.

And that's a funny thing to boast in, as I said, because normally, when we boast in something, we want to show people what we're boasting in, correct? It's all about, look at me, or look at what I've done, or look at what I've got.

So, remember when mum made you the best lunches for school. If you're Asian, of course, it's not going to be a cold sandwich, but a hot lunch. Maybe a bento box like this on the slide. And that's what, you know, you show others, you know, or rather, they would try and look into your box to see what you've got.

You boast about it and make them envious. But on the other hand, if all you have is a cold sandwich and a small piece of fruit, you wouldn't boast about those things, would you?

[7 : 11] In fact, you might just chuck it in the bin and hope mum doesn't find out. Well, hope looks a bit like that at first, doesn't it? Just like a cold sandwich. Because the nature of hope is such that there's really nothing to show for it.

It's future-oriented. You're still waiting for what has been promised. That's why it goes hand-in-hand with faith. Faith is trusting in what God's promised. Hope is waiting for that outcome.

And so what hope is this in, Paul says? Well, the glory of God. Remember Romans chapter 3 and verse 23, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Well, we know that we now have this hope to attain what we fell short of. You see, even though we've been justified, we're right before God, we're not sinless yet, are we?

We're only made righteous because of Jesus' death for us. But our character and our conduct still fall short of God's glory. But now we have the hope of one day becoming like Jesus, fully reflecting God's glory, and in fact being in His presence.

[8 : 26] I wonder whether that is your deep hope as a Christian. I think it would be if you truly realize how devastating sin is.

If we have ever looked at ourselves honestly, our own failures and ugliness would surely have grieved us. Well, we have this hope now, don't we?

It's something to glory in, to boast in, not through our own merit, but that one day God, when He welcomes us, will make us perfect.

And yet, we can't prove it to anyone, can we? All we can point to is God's word and His promise in it. And so our hope is really just in His word, that He would fulfill it.

Otherwise, we have nothing else to fall on. And so that's the first boast, and if you think that's strange as a boast, then wait till you hear about the second.

[9 : 32] For Paul next exhorts us to boast in sufferings. Verse 3. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character, and character hope.

And as I said earlier, the word here is glory, but it's actually the same word in verse 2 as in verse 2. It's actually boast. And here too, the word sufferings is a general reference to all hardship, not just suffering for Christ or persecution, but any sort of affliction in life.

But the question is, why boast in suffering? That doesn't seem to make sense at all, does it? Not at first. Well, Paul says, because it sets off a chain reaction that leads ultimately to hope, which was our first boast.

Boast in our sufferings because it produces perseverance, which produces character, which produces hope. So if you hope in something that's worth boasting about, then boast in sufferings too, is what Paul is saying, because that produces hope.

How so? Well, it's not to say that we don't have hope to begin with as we begin our life as Christians. We do. But I think the hope that Paul is referring here now is the steadfastness of that hope.

[10 : 58] That sufferings help us to grow in this hope as we persevere. Much like we saw with Abraham last week, hope against all hope. Be unwavering in our faith.

That sort of hope takes suffering to produce perseverance, to produce character, to then produce hope. But there are no shortcuts here as well, I think is what Paul is saying.

No bypassing of suffering in order to get that strength of hope. Because if the nature of hope is to wait on something, then we need to develop the character to be patient, to persevere and hang in there, to face disappointments but not give up, to deny ourselves immediate gratification and wait instead of God's ultimate gift.

It's a bit like not spoiling your appetite before a big banquet dinner by eating a cheap McDonald's meal, even though I know some of you think that the McDonald's meal is a banquet, or resisting the temptation to read at the end of a mystery novel until you read it all the way through from the start, or saving the pleasure for sex till marriage.

It's the same with the hope of God's glory. We say no to all sorts of temptations and endure hardship while we wait in order to attain to God's promise.

[12 : 30] And so suffering, which is that sort of waiting and enduring, is what produces this character, which strengthens us to hope. And that is the process that God uses to produce that hope.

And so Paul says, let's boast in it, let's glory in it, because we realize that's what God is doing in our lives. And Paul then says in verse 5 that if we do that, you wouldn't be disappointed by it.

He says, Hope, you see, is a risky and fragile endeavor, isn't it?

Because we're putting ourselves out there. We're putting all our eggs in one basket, as it were, God's basket. And if God doesn't come through for us, then, well, we're stuffed, aren't we? We will look like fools.

But we know, Paul says, God wouldn't disappoint us because God has poured out His love on us. Now, Paul here says that this love is poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

[13 : 41] What does he mean by this? Well, as Paul explains this now, he takes a step back, doesn't he, to show us how God has already demonstrated His love for us in Jesus. So in verse 6, you see, at just the right time when we're still powerless, that is, when we had done nothing to deserve God's love, Christ died for the ungodly.

Perhaps if we had been righteous, we would deserve God's love. But even so, Paul says, very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person. Besides, I think, Christ wouldn't have had to die if you were righteous.

But if you had been a good person, someone might possibly dare to die, Paul says. Paul here is differentiating a righteous person from a good one. A good person is someone you knew personally and considered to be good.

Much like when you recommend a plumber to a friend, you normally say, he's a good guy, you can trust him. So you might not die for a righteous stranger, as it were, but you might die for someone good that you knew, that you cared for.

But all of us are neither of these things, are we, to God? And so what does Paul say? He says, but God demonstrates his own love for us in this, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

[14 : 58] Nothing in us compelled God to send Jesus, only his love did, his free and gracious love. And the way the logic goes, if God did this while we were still sinners, while we were still his enemies, then how much more will God do it now that we're reconciled with him?

And so he says in verse 9, since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him? For if while we were still 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?

So we come back to God's love. If we can see it in the gift of his son Jesus, Paul says, which he's already shown to us, then how much more will he show it to us now that we've been reconciled with him?

And so indeed, we have this gift of the spirit as a demonstration of God's love. God has given us his spirit as an assurance of his ongoing love.

The fact that we believe, the fact that we continue to hope, actually, I think is a result of God's spirit at work in us. He's working in us to help us to wait for the day of God's glory.

[16:20] So the faith that you and I have, that is the result of God's ongoing work of the spirit in our hearts to keep believing. And so while Paul's words here is about pouring God's love, I think it's the equivalent of pouring God's spirit into our hearts.

God's love and that was fulfilled at the day of Pentecost, but it was prophesied by Joel in the passage that King Lee read for us tonight, which I've got on the side.

It's the same passage, actually, that Peter uses, the Apostle Peter quotes in Acts on the day of Pentecost. And there, the prophet Joel prophesied that in the last days, God will pour out his spirit on his people.

Like Peter, Paul recognized that this has now happened and that God's spirit is in our lives. This is God's evidence of his love for us and assurance that our hope will not be put to shame.

And Joel even prophesied in that prophecy in verse 32 that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. And if we read now here, Paul gives us this same assurance, doesn't he?

[17:30] Remain steadfast in our hope, keep calling on the Lord's name and we will be saved. Well, he says, how much more will we be saved through his life? Of which leads us to the third boasting, boasting in God himself.

For ultimately, God is the basis for our hope, isn't he? Without his promise, without his love, we have no hope to boast about.

But also, we boast in God because he's the object of our hope. because we have been saved from his wrath and we are reconciled to him, we now have a relationship with him.

He is our God. He is our Father. And so Paul, in verse 11, as we close, comes back to where he starts. Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

We're not merely being acquitted before a cold and unmoved judge. No, we've been reconciled to a loving Father who has created us and wishes to welcome us back into his arms.

[18:40] And so we have a God to boast in. Not in the sense that we deserve this relationship, but in the sense that we're able to point to God to say that he's the source of all our blessings and indeed, our very life.

We boast in him because he's all that we have. We boast in him because he's all that we need. And that's why we place our hope in him and in his glory.

And that's why we rejoice in sufferings so that this blessed hope may be strengthened in us. Now, as I said earlier at the very start, I think many of us are really feeling stage four at the moment, doing it tough.

It's only one week in, five more, to go at least. It's not the kind of suffering or hardship that we're looking for in life, is it? And it's easy, I guess, as we go through day after day to be overwhelmed by it.

But as Christians, as we read this passage tonight, we're called to look differently at sufferings, aren't we? Not to see it as an intrusion into our lives, but actually to see God's purpose for us in it.

[19:53] for when we know that even if this suffering is not of our own choosing, not even of our own fault, but that God is nevertheless using it to strengthen us, to give us a stronger hope, then we can actually rejoice in it, can't we?

Glory in it. And in fact, I think we have to realize that our hope in God might not otherwise grow in strength, because hardship makes us cling more to God, doesn't it?

And His promises. It strips away all the other crutches and comforts that we've been so used to, so that all we have left is God. And so our hope is placed firmly in Him, and waiting on that moment of glory.

And who knows, perhaps God is even using this affliction right now to prepare us for bigger challenges in life in the years to come. And because we persevere now, it produces the character that we need so that when this bigger test comes, whatever it may be, later on in life, we will be even more prepared.

We will be even stronger in our hope to be able to face that suffering or challenge when the time comes. And so each and every step of the way, God is preparing us, growing us in our character so

that we will remain steadfast in Christ until the very end when that hope of the glory of God is realized.

[21 : 33] Well, I'm going to finish now, and we're going to give some time as we said earlier for questions, so I do invite you to text them in, email the details on the slide again. So we're going to pray now, but feel free if you've got any questions over the next couple of minutes to send them in and Jeff and I will try and answer them.

Let's pray. Father, thank you again for your Son, Jesus, in whom we find reconciliation with you. Help us to look at sufferings the way you do so that we might boast and glory in it.

knowing that it produces hope in us for you, which we know will not disappoint because you've already shown us your love on the cross through your Son, Jesus.

Assure us that if we remain steadfast in hope, you will be our great reward when we finally meet you face to face. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.