

The Assurance of God

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Date: 19 August 2012

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[0:00] So let's pray. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for this letter to the Romans. And Father, we thank you for the many great truths that there are in this passage this morning.

Father, please help me to speak clearly and faithfully. Please help us all to hear, with ears to hear. And again, above all, please give us hearts that would seek to live in light of your word.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I'm not sure who does the cooking in your house. No one's going up? Okay.

Michelle very kindly does most of the cooking in our house. She's not here. I can get away with that. Actually, she does all the cooking in our house. And one night we were trying to get the children to eat more fish, because fish is healthy.

And so Michelle experimented with a new fish dish. But when our youngest tasted it, she screwed up her face and said, Mum, this chicken tastes funny. It's not because it's fish, dear, Michelle replied.

[1:04] And with the mention of fish, the complaints, the moans and groans from all the children came thick and fast. I must confess I didn't help the situation either, because I offered to make toast for everyone, including myself.

That was a bad move. And so Michelle rightly said, well, because you've all offended me, no dessert for you. And we don't get dessert very often in our house, so we all apologised.

And Michelle said, that's okay, you're now right with me. And when we were right with her came the blessing of dessert. Now this little story kind of illustrates, I hope, for us where we're at in the book of Romans.

You see, in verse 1, Paul says, Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, that is, since we have been made right with God, we have dot, dot, dot.

We have these blessings, like peace with God and so on. You see, today we're going to see that the blessings, what the blessings are from being right with God. But before we get to those blessings, it's interesting that Paul, in that very first line, that very first phrase, actually summarises the first four chapters of the letter so far.

[2:17] Remember how Paul has, he's outlined how people have offended God, who provided for us. He didn't cook us a dinner, of course, but he made the world. Yet as Paul said in chapter 1, we neither glorified him as God, nor gave thanks to him as God.

Instead, we turned our backs on him, and so were rightly under his anger or wrath. Even for the Jews who thought they were exempt, Paul says, No, no, you're under judgment too, because you who condemn others do the same things yourselves.

And so Paul's conclusion in chapter 3, verse 19, is that the whole world is held accountable to God. And then we heard that great news from chapter 3, verse 21, that now, apart from the law, God has offered a righteousness, offered a way to make people right with him and escape the judgment we deserve.

And that way to be right, that righteousness comes because of Jesus, Jesus who died for our sins so that we could be made right with God, so that we could be justified. And the word justify just means to be made right or righteous.

We use it ourselves, don't we? We try and justify ourselves, you know, make ourselves right with someone else. Kind of like the person who ran a red light, was pulled over by the police officer, and then tried to justify themselves.

[3 : 33] They said, I'm sorry, officer, but I'm colorblind. I didn't see the red light. Of course, they all knew that the red light was the top one, but that's the idea of justify, isn't it? We're trying to make ourselves right.

But with God, no one can make themselves right. No one can justify themselves before God. But God can justify us. And he says, because Jesus died for you, because he paid the fine, so to speak, then you can be right with me and go free.

And so as we heard last week, the way we receive this offer of being justified is by faith. Faith, trust, belief, three words mean the same thing. We receive this offer of justification, this offer of being made right with God by believing in Jesus.

For when we believe in Jesus, God declares us no longer guilty, but instead right with him. And here in chapter 5, in that first line, Paul summarizes all that.

He says, therefore, in light of everything that has happened, since we have been justified through faith, like I've been talking about for the last four chapters, we have blessings.

[4 : 39] And what is that first blessing? Well, the first blessing is peace. Verse 1, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. And now this blessing makes sense. I mean, if you are right with someone, then you're usually at peace with them, aren't you?

And in case we're tempted to think that this blessing isn't all that great, we need to remember what we once were. You see, we were once God's enemies. Verse 10, it's very hard for someone who was once an enemy to now experience genuine peace or reconciliation, as Paul will later describe it.

Take Israel and Palestine, for example. They've been enemies for years. They've been hating and bombing each other for years. And they tried to establish peace with the Oslo Agreement in the 90s, but it didn't work.

And now Israel is just building a big wall. I think I've got a slide of it. There it is. If you can see the wall, this huge concrete wall that runs for about 760 kilometres.

That's about the distance from Melbourne to Adelaide, to put it into perspective. A big wall. And they are hoping that this will establish peace. And even if, and it's a big if, even if it does establish some sort of peace, it will be a forced kind of peace.

[5 : 52] An uneasy kind of peace. But the peace of verse 1 is a genuine peace. It's complete reconciliation that's on view between us and God.

It would be like a Palestinian and an Israeli coming together and calling each other brothers. And their families going on picnics together. And their children sleeping over at one another's places. And their houses would be next door to each other.

And there would be no fences. Because they got on so well they didn't need a fence. Even their pets would play together. That's how harmonious their relationship would be. That's the kind of peace that's on view here.

It's what we heard in our first reading. That shalom, or peace, that Israel looked forward to. I tried to find an illustration. From Israel and Palestine.

And I typed into Google. Palestinian and Israeli call themselves brother. So I typed that in. And the first thing that popped up was a news article that said, Undercover Israeli soldiers shoot three brothers.

[6 : 52] I couldn't find one. I couldn't find a peace story. A story about genuine peace. And if there was, it would be an extraordinary story.

Because of their history. Because it's very hard to see for an enemy to have genuine peace. But that's the peace on view here. That's the peace we have with God.

Despite our history as God's enemies, we have now been reconciled as his friends. Or perhaps better, as his children. And it's not an uneasy, forced kind of peace. No, it's a genuine and personal peace.

To the point where God even allows us, who once rejected him, to call him Father. It's an extraordinary peace, when you stop to think about it.

You see, since we have been justified through faith, through the Lord Jesus Christ, we now have this great blessing of peace. But we also have another blessing, access to God's grace.

[7 : 48] See verse 2. Through whom, through Jesus also, and there should be a word also, we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.

Now what does Paul mean by this? Well, Paul means that God's grace or generosity that saved us continues to be available to help us as Christians.

You see, it is true that God has saved us because of his grace and generosity. He generously gave his son Jesus for us so that we could have peace with him and be made right with him.

But Paul is saying something more here. He's saying that we are not only stand on the shoulders of God's generosity, so to speak, but we actually stand in God's generosity, in his grace.

And no longer do we stand in wrath and judgment because of our sin, instead we stand in grace. And we haven't moved. We're still there, still standing in it. In other words, this access to God's grace is not a one-time offer.

[8 : 47] Rather, it's ongoing. We continue to have access to God's grace because we continue to stand in it. God's grace which saved us, you see, means more grace, more generosity to help us continue as Christians.

It's like what the writer of Hebrews says. On the next slide, Chris, a verse from Hebrews chapter 4, it says, Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace, more grace, to help us in our time of need.

Now again, this is a terrific blessing. You see, we're not only saved and then left on our own to get to heaven, are we? No, no. We are saved and through Jesus given continued access to God's generosity so that we might receive help to keep standing firm as Christians to the end.

Now, Paul will have more to say about God's grace next week in the second half of chapter 5, but for now, he focuses on the third blessing which he really wants to spend the rest of his time on. And the third blessing there is the end of verse 2.

He says, Paul says, we have hope.

[10 : 11] Having been justified, we now rejoice or boast in the hope of glory. In fact, this hope has come because we have peace, if you like. I don't know about you, but I've seen some pictures of people celebrating at the end of World War II when it was announced that victory was won.

I think I've got some pictures up there. And people are overjoyed. They're rejoicing, aren't they? Victory's won, war is over, there is now peace. There's two million people in Times Square, in New York, and there's another celebration.

People are celebrating, not just because the killing had stopped, but because the future now looked so much brighter. You see, with peace came new hope for them, if you like.

And it's the same for us. For not only have we been justified, not only do we have grace, which helps us to heaven, but we also have peace with God. And all of this means our future is so much brighter.

In other words, we have a real hope. In fact, Paul doesn't say we also have hope. He goes straight to saying we rejoice or we boast in this hope. Why? Well, because it's the hope of the glory of God.

[11:19] It's the hope of sharing in God's glory. It's not the kind of hope of sharing some earthly glory that the Olympians, you know, were hoping for. It's the hope of sharing God's heavenly glory.

It's sharing in the glory of his character, which we had fallen short of. Chapter 3, verse 23. It's sharing in the glory of reigning with Christ over the world, which we'll go on to talk about in chapter 8 and he mentioned in chapter 4.

It's sharing with new bodies the glory of a recreated world in all its perfection and splendour. It's a glorious future. In fact, he later says that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

So great it will be. So no wonder Paul goes straight to saying we boast, we rejoice in this hope. By the way, the word boast, as I've been using it, it simply means to rejoice or to cheer like the Australians did at the Olympics over all the gold medals or the silver medals.

Isn't that ridiculous? The poor guys getting hassled for not winning enough gold. Anyway, they rejoiced, didn't they? And if you saw the closing ceremony, they were all there having a great time rightly rejoicing in their hope or the hope realised at that point.

[12:31] How much more should we rejoice because our hope is so much more glorious. And in the meantime though, while we wait for it, we're to even rejoice in our sufferings, which seems kind of counterintuitive really, doesn't it?

Why are we to rejoice in our sufferings? Well, verse 3 says, not only so, but we also glory, this is where the NIV gets it wrong, the word glory there is the same word as boast or rejoice, not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character and character hope.

You see, we are to rejoice in our sufferings not because they are painful, but because of what they produce. How does this work? Well, when sufferings come, do you have to persevere or not?

You do, don't you? Suffering forces you to persevere. It forces you to trust God. Just like we exercise our muscles to grow in strength, suffering exercises our faith to strengthen it, to strengthen our faith and perseverance.

And when we strengthen our faith, when we persevere, it proves our character. The word character here talks about a proven or tested character. And with a proven and tested character, we're more likely to have confidence in that hope of glory.

[13:57] Let me see if I can illustrate. Michelle and I received a prayer letter from a Christian friend of ours whose wife is dying of cancer. She commented that she had chemo two weeks ago and was sad that her six friends that she started chemo with have all since passed away.

But instead of thinking, I'm next, she gave God thanks for her extended time. And even as the husband was writing the prayer letter, he said, while she's in bed resting with severe pain, she has not lost her joy in the Lord.

In fact, her Facebook page quotes Psalm 100 which says, shout for joy to the Lord or the earth. Don't get me wrong, her suffering is severe. But you see, her suffering is exercising her perseverance, exercising, strengthening her faith.

And that in turn is proving her character, if you like. Everyone can see the type of Christian character she has. A character that still rejoices in God and is even more confident of the hope of heaven, hope of sharing in the glory.

That's how it works here. Paul says, we rejoice in the hope of glory because it is so glorious and we even rejoice in suffering because in the end it produces even more confident hope.

[15:14] But most of all we rejoice in the hope of glory because it is certain and assured. And that's what Paul spends the rest of the passage explaining. We see in the first half of verse 5 there. First half of verse 5 he says, and hope does not put us to shame.

Hope does not disappoint us in other words. If we get to heaven, we rock up to heaven, we're not going to be made fools of because all that we had hoped for is not going to be there.

It's not going to be like that. We're not going to be put to shame because our hope of future glory turned out to be empty or not all that it was cracked up to be. This hope you see is different to our earthly hopes.

I don't know if you go for Collingwood here. We've got a couple of Collingwood supporters. Oh, it rumbles already. I could lose some friends here. You may have hoped they were going to win last night. Yes, they did.

And they didn't. Worldly hopes, they're not certain, are they? We hope, as Michelle and I hope as parents, that our children will be better behaved today than they were yesterday.

[16:14] It's pot luck. It's hit and miss. See, our earthly hopes, they're kind of 50-50, aren't they? It is a bit pot luck. They're not certain. They're not assured. But this hope is.

It won't put us to shame. It is certain. It is assured. Why? Well, the rest of verse 5, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Paul says that our hope is certain because God's love has been poured out into our hearts. In other words, we know God's love personally. You see, the Holy Spirit has converted us so that we benefit.

We know God's love in a personal way. You see, while it is true that God loves all people, it is also true that those whom the Spirit has converted are the ones who truly benefit from God's love, who are the special objects of God's love, the way children are the special objects of a father's love.

But how does God's love make our hope certain? Well, because of what it led to, verse 6, this should be, NIV mucks it up again, should be a word because or for at the start of verse 6, it says, for just at the right time when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

[17:32] See what Paul's saying? God's love makes our hope certain because God's love led to Christ dying for us so that we can enter glory. And this is no ordinary kind of love, verse 7, 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. You see, the pinnacle of human love is someone dying for another righteous or good person.

No one's really sure, by the way, what the difference is between a righteous and good person at this point. There's a few theories out there. But in the end, it doesn't really matter. The point is clear. The pinnacle of human love is dying for another person who is in some way worthy.

They're righteous or they're good or they're known to you personally, a friend or family member. There is something about them that makes them worthy of you dying for them. But there is nothing worthy about us.

Quite the opposite, actually. Verse 7 calls us ungodly. Verse 8 calls us sinners. Verse 10 calls us enemies. Yet while we were all those things, ungodly, sinful enemies, Christ died for us.

[18:47] That's love. I don't know about you, but I find it very easy to love people who are nice, people who are nice to me. Do you find that?

But I find it harder to love people who are mean, particularly people who might be mean to my children and so on. But God gave his son Jesus to die for us who are exactly like that.

We were unlovely wretches, yet Christ died for us. And our hope, therefore, is certain because of this love, this love of God that is greater than any human love, this love of God that led Christ to die for us while we were wretches.

In the end, this is the heart of our hope and assurance, God's love shown in Christ's death for us. This is what makes our hope so certain, for if God loved us enough to send his son to die for us while we were ungodly sinners, then how much more so, now that we are right with him, will he save us on judgment day?

If he loved us like that when we were his enemies, now that we're his friends, how much will he bring us into glory? That's the argument of verses 9 and 10.

[20:03] He says that, since therefore we have now been justified by his blood, how much more so 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?

See what Paul's saying here? Paul kind of returns to where he started in talking about justified and reconciled or peace, and he says if God has already made us right by the blood of Jesus in the past, then we can be certain he will save us from his wrath in the future.

I mean, do we think God having paid the penalty for us will then punish us? Of course not. Do you think having reconciled his enemies that he won't then save his friends, his children?

Of course he will. You see, our future is certain and secure because of God's love shown in Christ's death for us. You see that? And given all that God has done for us in the past and the certainty of our glorious future, glory in the future, then it ought to impact how we live in the present.

Which brings us to our final point and final verse, verse 11. Not only so is this so, but we also boast or rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have received reconciliation.

[21:26] See, not only do we boast or rejoice in the hope of glory, not only do we rejoice in our sufferings, but ultimately, says Paul, we rejoice in God. For it is God who has done it all through Jesus Christ our Lord.

In fact, that phrase, Jesus Christ our Lord, kind of bookends this passage. It's there in verse 1 and there in verse 11. In other words, it's all about Jesus. It's all because of Jesus that we have been justified and therefore have the blessings of peace, grace, and hope.

It's not from ourselves. I mean, verse 6 told us that we were powerless to save ourselves. but what we couldn't do, God did do through Jesus. That's why at the end of chapter 3, Paul said, he uses the same word boasting there, and he says, we cannot boast in ourselves, but here he says, we are though to boast in God.

We actually rejoice in God. And so the question is, do we? Do we rejoice in God? God who has justified us and reconciled us in the past and given us assurance of glory in the future?

Are we rejoicing in him in the present? That doesn't mean we all have to go around jumping up and down everywhere we go, and we're all kind of different personalities, so we'll express joy in different ways, but Christians should be people of joy, joy rejoicing in God, in the God who loved us so much that he gave his son to die for us.

[22 : 53] For example, do people know us as generally happy people? I mean, we all have bad hair days or whatever it is, but do people normally know us as joyful people?

There's a guy who goes to our four o'clock congregation and he became a Christian at the end of last year, and his work colleagues noticed that he was happier. And he asked, why are you happy?

He said, oh, I've become a Christian. And it's great. They noticed the joy. He was rejoicing in God, you see. And it's meant to express itself here in church as well.

I mean, see, do we gather with joy to boast in our God or do we gather to be solemn? I once heard a person complain because church was too happy. Not here.

It needed to be more solemn because we're here to worship God. Now, don't mishear me. We need to be reverent. We need to be reverent. But we gather to hear from God's word, to encourage one another, and to joyfully boast in him who gave his son for us.

[24 : 03] That's why I love it when we sing with gusto those great hymns, with joy, because it tells me you are joyful in God for what he's done for you. It's hard when we've got liturgy and things on the screen.

I preached this morning and had a couple of people nod, not nod off, just nod. But then we kind of did some liturgy about the Lord's Supper.

And I just happened to overhear someone, and we thank you God for sending Jesus to die. And I said, oh dear, it's so easy to do, isn't it? To forget all that God has done for us, to not rejoice in him.

We are to rejoice or boast in God, through whom we have received reconciliation. And not only are we to rejoice in God, but we have a different perspective in this present life. You see, although Paul started off by talking about the blessings that come from being right with God, he spent most of the passage talking about our hope of glory and why it is so certain.

In other words, he spent most of the passage talking about our assurance of our future, our heavenly future. In fact, Paul will return to this theme at the end of chapter 8, which kind of bookends section of chapters 5 to 8.

[25 : 18] You see, God wants us to be certain of our future, to be assured of where we are headed and what we will share in. For once we are assured of that, then it frees us for living for this world and frees us to live for the next world.

It changes our priorities to live, not for this world, but for Jesus and the next world. You see, why is it that people work so hard to get as many things as they can in this life and have as comfortable a life and experience as many things in this life?

Well, it's because they've got nothing to look forward to in the next life. But we do, and it's certain, and so it changes our priorities. And if we miss out on things in this life because we are Christians or if we suffer for being Christians in this life, that's okay, because guess what?

We're getting the next life. Glory, you see. I know a guy whom we'll call Rob, and he used to work at McDonald's when he was going through high school.

In the later years of high school, he started going on beach mission. I'm not sure if you're familiar with beach mission, but it's where a group of Christians from different churches go to a caravan park from Boxing Day to a couple days after New Year's Day because that's the time when the caravan parks are the fullest, and they run programs for children and for adults and try and talk about Jesus in the process.

[26:37] And every year, Rob would go to beach mission. The problem was that period of year was the busiest for McDonald's. And the senior managers said to Rob, look, you're a good worker, and we want to promote you to manager, but you can't have this time off every year because that's our busiest time.

Now, manager of McDonald's, it doesn't sound all that glorious to you, I'm sure, but for a teenager, it's a pretty big compliment, including a big pay rise. It was hard for Rob, but he chose not the promotion, but to keep going for beach mission.

And it was a real cost for him. But he said to me, oh well, I'll share it in glory with others, which beats being a manager at Maccas any day. You see, he was so sure and certain of his future glory that it impacted his present life, his present priorities.

And whatever it cost him for following Jesus in this life, well, that was nothing compared to what he knew was waiting for him in the next. Our certain hope in the future is meant to impact our lives in the present, you see.

Paul says, therefore, since we have been justified by faith through our Lord Jesus Christ, we have, what do we have? We have peace with God, personal, relational peace.

[27:56] We have access to grace for help in our Christian journey, our Christian walk, and we have a certain and sure hope of glory, glory in heaven.

And it's all because of God's love shown in Christ's death for us. For it's in Christ alone our hope is found. Let's pray.

Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your love seen in the sending of your Son to die for us, ungodly, sinful enemies that we once were.

And Father, we thank you that because of this love shown in Christ's death, that we can be justified with you, we can enjoy peace with you, call you Father in prayer, have continued access to your generous help, hope, and be certain above all else of where we are headed.

Father, in light of this, we do pray that you would help us to always rejoice in you, to continually praise and thank you, and in light of our certain hope, we pray that you would help us to live not for this life, but for the life to come.

[29:15] We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.