

Romans 5:6-11 AM

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[0 : 00] Let us pray. Heavenly Father, as we listen to your voice in Holy Scripture this morning, we do ask that! you would convince us of your love, that you would assure us of our salvation in Christ, and that you would give us joy in you. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. You may be seated.

Amen. So, it's the second week of our sermon series in Lent, The Cross of Christ, and we, last week, we were in John chapter 12, and now we're skipping a couple books of the Bible, and we're parachuting into Romans chapter 5. This can be found on page 942 of your pew Bible.

It'd be helpful to go there. As we parachute into Romans chapter 5, it's helpful to know that Paul is explaining why we have hope. If you place your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, not only does he forgive you of your sins and cleanse you of all unrighteousness and make you right with God and give you peace with God, but he fills you with hope, with a hope that is sturdy and steadfast in a world where we are easily shaken. Now, elsewhere in Scripture, we're told that one of the ways that we can honor Christ in a world that's constantly being shaken, one of the ways that we can honor Christ, even when we're in the midst of our own sufferings, is by being prepared to give a reason for the hope that is in us. Now, right away, I can imagine some of you saying, you're assuming here that I have hope, but what if I don't? What if I feel so stuck or broken or damaged or ashamed or misunderstood or alone or lost that I'm at a place where I feel like I've lost all hope?

Like, Paul, how can you tell me why we have hope when I don't have hope? And I just want to say right from the beginning that if you're in that place and you're here right now, I want to acknowledge that that's a really hard place to be. I'm thankful you're here, though. It takes courage to be here.

And I'm hoping that Romans chapter 5 will be good news for you today, because the Apostle Paul essentially says that our hope does not rest on what we do and don't have. Our hope doesn't rest on the relative joy of our surrounding circumstances or how we feel about the circumstances that we're experiencing in life. In chapter 5, Paul says that our hope rests on the death of Jesus Christ. He says it's something objective, it's something concrete, it's something sturdy, and it's something unshakable. It's something that's already happened for us.

[2 : 58] So there's this amazing thing that's happening here where Paul says it's actually what has happened in the past that gives us hope for the future. It's past grace that has secured our future glory.

And so the main question that we're looking at in Romans chapter 5 is what is it about the death of Jesus Christ, about the cross of Christ, that gives us hope? What is it about his death that gives us hope? And I think there are three things that Paul simply gives us. As Paul says to us, the death of Jesus means that God loves you. It's proof of God's love. Number two, it means that you can be assured of your salvation. It is assurance of salvation. And number three, it means that you can rejoice in God. It's joy in God. So we're going to begin with proof of love. Paul speaks of Christ's death on the cross as proof of the Father's love for us. So look at verse 6 if you're there with me. For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died, there's the first reference to it, for the ungodly. One will scarcely die for a righteous person. This is what Will was talking about. 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. Paul's speaking to those who live with a nagging doubt about whether God truly loves them. And there are a lot of ways that we can respond to this. Some respond to this sort of doubt of God's love by spending their lives trying to achieve and achieve and achieve and prove that they are worthy of the love that they so desire. Others, on the other hand, thinking that there's a deficit of love with God, they run to other people and places and sources looking for the love that only God can give. And yet what they find is that their hearts are hurting as their yearnings remain unfulfilled. So an interesting example of this, about 10 years ago,

I was standing in line in Superstore on Southwest Marine Drive. Any of you been there before? Those can be really exciting lines. And very long. About 10 years ago, I was buying groceries actually to make dinner for the young adults here at St. John's. And one of the magazines near the till when I was in line had an eye-catching headline. It said, Hugh Hefner was dying. Do you guys remember who he was?

Yeah, yeah. And I had this quote from him that I'll never forget. I quoted him as saying, I'm afraid of being alone and wondering if anyone loves me.

[5 : 48] And it just dawned on me, I was like, a man who spent his whole life surrounded by women was dying at the end of his life with a deficit of love. See, some try to prove themselves worthy of God's love.

Others are trying to look for love in all the wrong places. And then there are some of us who just all together are hiding from God's love. And there's a whole bunch of sophisticated and nifty ways we can do this. Sometimes it can be through blatant intellectual rejection, like new atheism.

Or sometimes it can just be through the subtle art of distraction, a new phone. Scared that if God really sees who we are, not just how we present ourselves to others or who we wish we were, but if God really saw the secret sins and the addictions and the shame that we struggle with, there's no way He would possibly love us anymore.

And all of these ways of doubting God's love ultimately hinge on one of two beliefs. Either on the one hand, we believe that God can't ultimately give us the love that we want.

Or on the other hand, we believe that we are not worthy of the love that God gives. And Paul's main point here in Romans chapter 5 is that God gives us the love that we so desperately were made for. He pours His Holy Spirit into our hearts, we see in verse 5. And we also see that God gives us the love of which we are not worthy. He proves His love for us through the death of Jesus Christ. And did you notice how Paul made that point? Did you notice how he talked about the timing of Christ's death? Look at verse 6. For while we were still weak, Christ died for the ungodly.

[7 : 39] Then verse 8. He shows His love for us in that, here's the timing, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Do you notice that? It's not saying after you repented and you wanted to follow the Lord Jesus, He died for you. It's saying while you were ungodly, while nothing in your life reflected or was aligned with God, He died for you. It's saying while you were sinners and enemies, not while you were friends of God, but while you were dead set against Him, living your own way and rejecting His way, that's when God died for you. It's not when you were actually filled with power and able to love God. It was actually when you were too weak to even seek Him and love Him. That's when God died for you.

And so Paul's main point here is that nothing in us could deserve His love. Nothing in us is worthy of His love, and yet it is precisely there that He loved you. So it means that God's love must not be based on your worth. Now in the ancient world, it was assumed that you should give good gifts to people who are worthy of receiving good gifts. And the greater the gift, the costlier, the more extravagant and amazing the gift, the more worthy the recipient should be who receives it. That's why you see like gold and frankincense and myrrh being brought to Jesus. These are gifts fit for a king and only a king.

But here, Paul says that the gospel of Jesus Christ is exactly the opposite. God gives the greatest, most extravagant and costly gifts to the most unworthy recipients. And Christ's death here is viewed as proof of God's love. And because it's not based on our worth, but simply on the God who wants to love us, it becomes the foundation of hope for us.

You know that when somebody loves you, it gives you hope, right? Now that His love is proven, He will not let us go. Do you see what I'm saying here? Paul is emphasizing the fact that God's love is not based on our worth.

It's not based on what we deserve, meaning that nothing in us can actually be the cause of losing that love. So if nothing in us deserves His love, then nothing in us can deter Him from loving us in Christ Jesus.

[10 : 08] And that leads us to our second point. The cross of Christ is not just proof of God's love. It is also assurance of full salvation. Look at verse 9 with me.

Since therefore. Notice this follows right on the heels of love. Since therefore. We have now been justified, made right with Him by His blood.

How much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God? Verse 10. 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.

Did you notice the kind of logic that Paul did there? He took two passes of the same logic. He reasoned from past to present. You were this and now you're this.

and then he reasoned from the present to the future. Because you are now this, we can trust that this will be the case in the future. Does that make sense? He reasons from past to present and from present to future.

[11 : 16] And in between, he puts this little phrase much more. Did you notice that? Much more. In other words, he's saying the thing that I've already done is the really hard thing.

And the thing that I will do is comparatively easy. So making you my children was hard work. Keeping you as mine will be easy in comparison.

And so he says we were sinners and now we have been justified, made right by God. And because we have been justified, we will be saved by Him. He says we were enemies and now we've been reconciled to Him, made friends of God again.

And because we are reconciled to Him, we will be saved. And there are two things that Paul points to in the future that we need to be saved from, that we will be saved from, that for Him is meant to assure us of the salvation that God's given us.

The first thing is in verse 9. He says, how much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God? So the first thing that we're being saved from, according to Paul, that should assure us of our salvation is we are being saved from God's wrath.

[12 : 31] Now God's wrath is not just God's, it's not God being cranky or irritable or harsh, like a father who loses his patience with his children in some way.

God's wrath is not something that flippantly turns on and off. It is an aspect of the holiness of His character that He opposes, He is not complacent about sin and evil, but He personally opposes every form of sin and evil in the world.

He opposes any form of opposition to Him. And Paul tells us in a few chapters later that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

And the reason for that is that on the cross, Christ drank the cup of God's wrath on our behalf. God was opposed to our sin and He was opposed to our opposition to Him.

And He poured out that opposition on His Son Jesus on the cross so that in the day of eternity when we come before the judgment seat of God, we would not receive a God who's opposed to us, but a God who freely welcomes us.

[13 : 50] And this is really important, friends, because it tells us that part of the plight of our humanity that Christ has come to save is not just that we're broken and we need healing or that we're wayward and we need to be found or that we're blind and we need to see.

It's that we're in danger of judgment and we need to be saved from that. And this is not just Paul's personal opinion about God.

He's saying that God has revealed this about Himself to Paul. So the first reason we have hope here, we can be assured that He's going to save us from the wrath to come.

But the second comes in verse 10, if you look there with me. He says much more, second half of verse 10, now that we are reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

So first it was wrath and now Jesus' life is going to save us from death. Paul says that the wages of sin is death. And death is a combination, it's a deadly cocktail of spiritual separation from the author of life and of physical mortality.

[15 : 02] So spiritual separation and physical mortality is the cocktail of death. And through Christ's death, Christ drinks that deadly cocktail.

And He assures us that He has already paid the wages of sin so that death will not be the final word. Did you notice in verse 10 it says we are saved by His life.

This is a reference to Jesus' resurrection life, the resurrection life that He now lives in the presence of God. And He says that we, our groaning bodies, are going to be restored like Jesus' body and made fit to be in the eternal, unmediated presence of God.

And so what we see Paul talking about here in terms of trying to assure us of our salvation is He's saying, you don't need to fear the wrath of God. He has proven His love to you.

You don't need to fear death. His life will have the final word over you. God is on our side and He will save us in the end. He will hold us fast.

[16:09] And that, when Paul reflects on this, God's love and God's assurance, it leads us to the third thing, which is pure joy. Verse 11. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Do you see that little word rejoice there? Rejoice in God? The word underneath it actually means boast. boast. It's, for Paul, boasting in anything or anyone outside of God is called pride.

And for Paul, boasting in God is called faith. It's about where you place your confidence in life and it's about where you find your joy in life.

So the word suggests this combination of confidence and joy. It's a confident joy. It's a joyful confidence in God. And so it begs the question for us, at the end of all of this, Paul's trying to prove that God loves us.

He's trying to assure us of salvation. And then he asks, it's almost like he's asking us at the end, where is your confidence in life? Is your confidence in God?

[17:30] And is your confidence in God for the right reasons? See, there's a whole lot of, this is something that I think is really startling about the gospel. The gospel tells us we can have confidence in God, but we can have confidence in God for the wrong reasons.

And when you hear that, it kind of shocks you. See, on the one hand, we can have this really vague sense of confidence, like God is just generally trustworthy and everything's going to be okay with him.

It's this general sense of the world's going to work out okay for me. But here, what God wants us to have is confidence, hearts that are tethered to the cross of Christ in particular.

There's also a way of having confidence that's not really confidence in God, it's more confidence in how I have lived for God or what I've done for him. So Lord, you know I've faithfully attended church for 50 years now, right?

I've served you faithfully, Lord. I've grown in holiness, Lord. There's also other reasons we can have confidence in God.

[18:36] It can be because, Lord, we want you to bless us in a particular way. We want you to fix this. We want you to deliver us from this particular thing. And one of the reasons, ways you know that you have put confidence in something other than God is that when that thing is taken away or when that thing is threatened in your life, then your confidence starts to crumble.

So for example, if you, this is just a random example, if you place confidence in what other people think of you, whether it's at work or at home or school or whatever it is, the second somebody says something critical of you, it's going to shake you to the core.

There's a number of things we could talk about. If you put confidence in having a certain amount of money in the bank account, the second the economy goes sideways and that money is no longer there or guaranteed, your confidence will be shaken to the core.

There's a lot of things that we put our confidence in, and what Jesus wants us to, what Paul wants us to do is he wants the confidence of our hearts and our lives to be tethered to the cross of Christ. And this is part of the reason why I love our creeds so much. Because our creeds don't depict hope and confidence in the Christian faith as something that's just kind of warm, fuzzy feelings.

[19:58] They depict the Christian faith as particular people in particular places and particular events. And they invite our hearts to lay hold of God's love in the particular way that he has given it.

So they say, I believe in Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, buried, descended to the dead, rose again, sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty.

It is a particular person and a particular life that is the incarnate love of God. And for those who taste and see this love, they find themselves surprised by joy.

Even in the midst of all the difficulty of life and even if death is right around the corner for you, surprised by joy. And those who taste and see this love find themselves reaching out to this Lord who loves them, seeking them and finding him and clinging to him.

They find themselves yearning to be with him and finding great delight in praising him. They think and they speak of him often and naturally and spontaneously and thankfully.

[21:15] They return to him and they rest in him and they are refreshed by him and they never tire of lifting high the cross. See, that's a beautiful picture of the Christian life, a gentle, joyful confidence in the power of the cross.

So Paul tells us this is why we have hope. Through the death of Jesus, God has given us proof of his love, assurance of his salvation and joy in him and if you are a Christian, this is why you have hope even in the face of great difficulty.

But if you're not a Christian yet, you can have this hope too. You can have this hope too. Two words at the very end of our passage are the key to having this hope.

Paul says, received reconciliation. And this is a message that we're going to hear again actually next week in 2 Corinthians. A very loving and a very clear appeal on behalf of a very gracious Savior.

We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. Because the truth of the gospel here through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ is that you were once an enemy of God but now you can be a friend of God.

[22 : 29] You were once running from the throne of wrath but now you can be running to the throne of grace. You were once living with a deficit love and now you can live with an overabundance and riches of love.

You were once boasting in your own little accomplishments and self-assurances but now you can boast in Christ's great accomplishment and his great assurance.

So come to the Lord Jesus again. Place your trust in him and his death for you. Be confident in his love and assured of his salvation. In the cross of Christ he has given you every reason to have hope.

Brothers and sisters, I speak these things to you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen.