

Peace, Access, Rejoicing and Hope

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 July 2020

Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 0 0] Romans chapter 5, and looking especially at the first four verses, verses 4 to 5 or so of the chapter, I'll just read the first one again. Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. It's a wonderful thing to discover in Scripture and to investigate or look at it more and more, the wonderful things that actually flow from our justification, our being set right with God. And this is one passage where you have a string of things, there are four especially in these verses, that follow on immediately from our justification, from being justified by or through faith in Christ. And again, it's a reminder to us because some of these things are very much to do with our experience and not just our theological position in relation to God. But it does remind us that theology, the greatest theology that you get from the Bible, is invariably attached to a practical way of life. And you can see that from this passage itself, some of that really wonderfully deep theology, Christ himself, the way in which we are justified by faith in Christ, and how that goes on to give us the experience or attached to the experience of our hope, our endurance, and our suffering. All of these things are intimately connected with that.

And you can see the change here in Paul's language as well. It's interesting that up to now, he's been talking about others, mostly, but when he comes here, he, verse 1 of chapter 5, therefore, since we have been justified. And it's always interesting how the great apostle actually never leaves himself, you find the same with John, of course, and the other apostles, they never leave themselves out of any of the moral or spiritual requirements that God makes of his people, and that they are speaking of as apostles in the name of God to pass on to his church. So here he is saying, therefore, since we have been justified by faith, he's including himself in those great privileges. And the four that we want to mention tonight briefly, just one after another, that's thrown together very closely. First of all, the privilege of having peace with God. Secondly, of having a standing in God's grace.

And thirdly, rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God. And then he goes on, fourthly, to speak about rejoicing also in our sufferings. And tacked on to that is something of the reason or what is attached to that as well. So having been justified by faith, we could go into the language there as well, since we have been justified. It's something that has happened in the past, in God's act, in God's way.

It's an act that he has carried out. And it goes on, the kind of tense that's used there is something that continues on. We have been justified. It happened and it's still in force. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. And it's very obvious to us, and it's obvious from our own experience as well, but having peace is such a precious, precious thing. Alan mentioned in his prayer, places in the world that we know of are reported on the news as having little peace in the experience of those who live there, devastated by war, famine, lack of water, terrorism, persecution, all of these things sometimes combined. And when we have such peaceful conditions to live in, we sometimes are guilty of forgetting just how privileged we are in that, and that there are so many millions throughout the world who don't have peace in virtually any sense, unless they have peace, of course, with God, which is possible in those circumstances too. And while it's important for us to think of individual peace with God, and that is very important, when we speak about peace with God from Scripture, it obviously includes peace in a domestic setting, it includes peace in a national setting, and includes even peace in an international setting as well. Because peace with God is something that is not confined to either an individual life or to family life or even to a national life, but it spreads throughout all nations where God's peace is enjoyed by his people. And you can see the affirmation here that this peace of God and peace with God, that is very closely connected to reconciliation. The two, in fact, are so closely connected, you can't really separate them.

And one from the other, apart from the fact that they are distinct in themselves. When you think of reconciliation, we think of God announcing righteousness as something that's, if you like, put on our record. The picture usually in Paul is one of a courtroom scene in a courtroom where the judge actually makes the pronouncement in regard to the accused, you are actually righteous.

[5 : 39] You are more than just not guilty, you are righteous because God accepts the righteousness of Jesus in our place. And when we are in Christ and are justified by faith, we have peace with God through him, through Christ. And the judge, as he pronounces, you think of God doing this, that we are justified, we are seen as righteous by him. Attached to that, there is this emphasis on reconciliation. So what a wonderful combination you have there in our God, in himself, that he is at one and the same time to us, who trust in Christ, our judge who pronounces us righteous, and also our friend who is reconciled to us and we to him, our father in heaven. And where is there anything more precious than that, that you think of God in those terms as the Bible presents it. And it's important too that we think of this as actually now our possession and our property. Not saying that we will have peace with God someday, that we will have peace when we come to heaven, that we'll know full reconciliation with God when this life is over and we're taken into a better place. This is now, he's saying, that we have this. We do have it, we do possess it now. And we are, in fact, reconciled to God. Our reconciliation is as complete as it will ever be. Our righteousness is as complete as it will ever be.

You know, sometimes it's just looking, as we said at the beginning, at these great doctrines of the Bible that really fires up your heart with devotion. Now, there's nothing whatsoever wrong with reading, of course, devotional literature, whether it's biographies or Bible studies or whatever type of devotional daily reading, something like that. We all use these and share from time to time very profitably. But I do find myself that very often, if that really sometimes doesn't stir your heart the way you really want it to be stirred, you then go to, let's say, the doctrine of the atonement or something to do with Christ's death or his resurrection. You find some great doctrine in the Bible. You read about that and that really so often will stimulate your mind and your heart.

And as you take that in, you just then are filled with a greater sense of gratitude, of devotion, of dependence upon God. So he's saying here, first, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The second thing he's saying is we have access. Through him, we've obtained access by faith, the same faith, the same faith into this grace in which we stand. And when he says the grace in which we stand, he really means pretty much the status that we have with God between ourselves and God, the status that involves acceptance with God, a position in his family being adopted as children. All of those things are actually ours. We have this standing. We have this status in God's sight, which really cannot actually be higher than it is. Because everything that Christ deserves to be given to his people is what God has determined to give us. And how wonderful is that?

Everything for which Christ has died for his people, we come to obtain it by faith in him. It becomes our possession. And we have access into this grace. You think of a picture again here, something like God as a king, perhaps. You think, you know, what it's like when you see a video of the Queen or Prince Charles, whoever it is, that's giving out awards, like you find in the honours lists, for example.

[9 : 48] When they come forward, they're called forward and the award is pinned onto them. A few words exchanged and then off they go. So they're actually introduced to the Queen. They're part of, for that moment, they're in the court of the Queen and they're formally introduced. And that's really what Jesus has done for us as well. And what we have in this standing, the standing involves, we've been introduced to God, the Father. God, the Father has pinned on us the status, the signs of the status that God gives through Christ to us. And we have this access by faith into this grace wherein we stand. And of course, the wonderful thing is when you go, if anyone goes to Buckingham Palace for an award, whatever it is, whether it's an OBE or whatever, they're only there for a matter of seconds, basically, and then they're out and somebody else comes forward to take their place. And of course, with God, once you're there, you're there. You don't have to leave. You're never put out.

Nobody else comes to take your place. So this standing that we have in God's presence, I'm thinking of 1 Peter chapter 3 and verse 18, where we find again, Jesus and the death of Jesus mentioned, that Christ has died the just for the unjust. There's the core really of our redemption, Christ's substitution, the just one for the unjust in our place. What does it lead to?

So as to bring us to God. He died the just for the unjust to bring us to God. And that's, in many ways, what you find described in the Bible as our standing, where we come to be introduced to God, the Father, by Jesus on the basis of what he has done. And if you picture it that way, that's the second privilege we have, this standing. I think it was St. Spurgeon at one time speaking about the death of the thief on the cross. And although he was crucified, of course, at the same time as Jesus, the Virgin was picturing Jesus coming to introduce this thief into heaven, into the presence of the Father. And he was imagining that Jesus would say something like, Father, this is a sample of those who are going to follow. One who didn't deserve anything of what

I've given him or died for. But here he is. I introduce him to you. And I leave him with you. And that, of course, is true for that thief as it was for everyone who comes to have a standing standing in the presence of God. And that is something which remains with us as well.

You know, you sometimes find in the likes of, particularly in the likes of politics, perhaps, or other things similar to that, somebody is in favour with, whether it's the Prime Minister or whoever is in charge, they're in favour for a while, but then all too often they fall out of favour, something happens. So they're then either sacked or moved on. Somebody else comes, to take their place. They're no longer in the favour of the person in charge. So things change.

[13 : 13] But when God takes us into his favour, because of Christ and what continues to be our favour in Christ with God, that's how it always will remain. You know, we'll never be out of favour in Christ. We will never be out of favour with God when it's been placed on our behalf and in our experience, when our persons are actually made right with God. We have peace with God. We have this access into this grace in which we stand. And then he thirdly speaks about rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God. We live in a world, as you know very well, that at the moment, especially, although it's always the case, it's filled with uncertainty, with fear, with anxiety. And there's so much of that about just now. And people hope things will improve. People hope that this virus will not come back in a worse way than it's been. People hope that the lockdown will be over soon, as it's beginning to be unlocked just now. And there's all kinds of hope in relation to that, and many, many, many other things in life's experience. But none of these things actually are certain. The hope in relation to these things is not a certain hope. It may well be that the things that are hoped for on that level will actually never come to pass. But this hope, this Christian hope, this hope that comes to us on the basis of what Christ has done, this hope that is planted in our hearts by the Holy Spirit in that new birth, that is the hope which is sure and positive. Now, that doesn't mean that my experience of this hope or exercise of this hope will not wane, that it will not sometimes be stronger than it is at other times. There are all of these fluctuations that we know of in our experience. And sometimes we can be as fearful that we almost lose sight of our hope and having hope at all, and maybe come to question where we ever saved and so on. But what Paul is saying is, this hope that God gives to us is based upon such things as the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and all the promises of God that are attached to Jesus

Christ and our standing in him. And that can't fail. And you know, the two things about God that are brought before us, and constantly throughout the New Testament especially, on which our hope is grounded, is God's own faithfulness. He's always true to his word, and God's omnipotence, God's almightiness. How do we know that the promises he makes towards us tonight, wonderfully great as they are, how do we know that they will be undoubtedly fulfilled by God? How do we know that God will, in fact, bring everyone who trusts in him, and who has placed faith in Christ, even if it's sometimes a faith that appears very weak and shaky? How do we know that everyone with real faith in Christ will absolutely undoubtedly come to be with God in glory? Well, we can say we know it's true, we know it's certain, because God is faithful. God is always faithful to his promise, and that's accompanied by his power to fulfill what he has promised to bring about. And I think that's why it says in verse 5 there, the hope that he gives us does not put us to shame, or will not put us to shame. That's always associated with a promise that has come to fail. You've put your trust in someone, they've promised you something, you've lent them something, and they say, oh, I'll pay you back, I'll do this, and they let you down. The promise has not been based on truth, or truthfulness, on faithfulness. And so you're put to shame because that promise is not fulfilled for you.

But that's never the case with God. Every single promise, as it's based on his own faithfulness, and accompanied by his power, means we will never, who trust in him and in his promises, will never be put to shame. What a great strengthening that is, when we ourselves are sometimes so fearful. But you know what he's saying here, we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. That's not just to do with feelings, so you can't detach that from it. We rejoice in the sense we experience rejoicing. Joy is a very real emotion. We shouldn't be afraid of that or expressing that.

But rejoicing is actually something that belongs to a spiritual state and relation with God. It's a steadiness in your heart through faith that, despite things being difficult at times, you can still rejoice in Christ and what he has done. You can still say, I know that that's not going to fail me, even though at the moment I can't see things clearly. And so you actually come to rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And you could take that in different ways, but it means, of course, not just glory with God, but I think also even as far as the glory of God in the sense that what he has in mind for his people is to be like him and to reflect his glory and to be image bearers of his glory, finally, in the state of glory. That's what our hope is actually stretching out towards. And I have to say to myself, so very often, especially because, as I'm often reminded,

I have a kind of a serious face. I don't have a face like so many people have that fills up brightly and, you know, you can tell that face is full of joy. So I've got to work hard at showing joy, even in a facial way. But be that as it may, hope does not, is not, you don't spell the word hope by the words G-L-U-M. It's H-O-P-E. And it's a hope in which we actually rejoice in hope of the glory of God, God's own likeness. So go back again to where we began with that point, the world's hope, the hope that things somehow will be better, or the hope that somehow at the end of the day, at the end of my life in this world, I'll get to heaven, I'll get to enter heaven.

[20 : 18] Hope that, well, if I win the lottery tomorrow, what a difference that's going to make to my life. That's the kind of hope, sadly, that so many people in the world live for. Whereas this positive Christian hope is actually grounded in Christ, grounded in his work, grounded in his resurrection, grounded in the promises of God, and therefore cannot fail to be fulfilled.

So these three things first, and then finally, we also, he says, rejoice in our sufferings. Same word as he's used there, rejoice in hope, and now rejoice in our suffering.

And that's, of course, a very challenging thing. But we have to bear in mind that the word rejoice here also carries in it the element of putting your trust in something.

And so in a way, Paul is actually saying we end up putting our trust in sufferings. Why? Knowing that our suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.

He's come full circle. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, which has been given to us. And I think in that he's been doing something very much similar to what he has said in 2 Corinthians in regard to suffering, and how that produces certain things in the life of those who believe.

[21 : 47] And, you know, when you go to the likes of the passage there in 2 Corinthians chapter 4, where he says at verse 18, He says, And the point in relation to what we're looking at tonight is how he uses these words there, the slight momentary affliction, is preparing for us.

It's not just preparing us for, but preparing for us. God uses these afflictions, as he says here in Romans 5, in his hand, these afflictions, these sufferings, and they're not, it's a word that means something very deep.

Sufferings, it really is afflictions, not just ordinary aches and pains, so these might sometimes be sore. And their afflictions, their heart pains, mind pains, but he says they produce endurance.

And endurance, or perseverance, produces character, and character produces hope. And that's saying to me tonight, that whenever I'm conscious of whatever afflictions, from time to time, I may be conscious of what I should be doing with them, is saying, Lord, I hand this over to you, because in your hands, they're going to be productive.

In your hands, it's going to produce further endurance, and perseverance, and character, and it's going to fuel my hope even further. And so, it's a feature, Paul is saying, of, really, of the way to glory, just as it was for Jesus himself.

[23 : 56] And it produces these in us now, as we go through with what remains of our Christian life. And as he says there, in the final part of the passage, in verse 5, he talks about God's love, having been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, which has been given to us.

And the best way to experience that love of God, he says from this passage, is to know the work of the Spirit, and to realize that all of these difficult things, in God's way, produces this wonderful fruit in all of these elements that are mentioned there.

So, the four things that flow from being justified, we have peace with God, we have the standing in God's grace, we rejoice in hope of the glory of God, and we also even rejoice in our sufferings.

May God bless these thoughts to us. Let's finish with prayer. Lord, our God, we stand amazed at how often we come across in your word things which we would naturally shy away from, even as you people, will sometimes shrink from, how you use them for our good, how you use them to bring us further into the shape of your image in Christ Jesus.

And we bless you for that great prospect that these words hold before us, that you are fashioning your people into the image of Christ, which finally will be revealed on that day of glory at his return.

[25 : 31] So bless us, we pray, as we once again come to know your word and help us to carry it forward into our lives from day to day. Hear the prayers of your people here and elsewhere tonight and pardon our sins now for Jesus' sake.

Amen. We're going to conclude tonight by singing. from moment of drei T Do Do