

Romans 5

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Good morning. To anyone who happens to be watching our live cast on the Pacific Islands, Happy New Year. To the rest of you, Happy New Year soon.

In his email to us this week, Pastor Matt put some New Year's thoughts. One of the verses he quoted was in Psalm 40. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God.

And so as we think about ways in which we look forward to the new year and also look back on 2023, when I look back on 2023, one of the first things that comes to my mind is the Thanksgiving service we had about six weeks ago.

And just how within this church community, we have seen prayers answered in miraculous ways. And we've also seen a lot of heartbreaking losses.

And there are things about this year, memories that we want to take forward with us. And there are losses that we are forced to take forward with us.

[1 : 08] And we stand here celebrating God's goodness. When in some ways it is very palpable and we're excited to do so. And in some ways we're still mystified and don't exactly see it ourselves.

But in faith we've gathered together. And we want to rise now and praise his name. Encouraging those of us who are struggling to do so. And overflowing with joy if that is the blessing you have felt. So would you please rise and let's begin singing. Joy to the world the Lord is known.

Let earth receive her King. Let every heart prepare in room.

And heaven and nature sing. And heaven and nature sing. And heaven and hands and nature sing.

[2 : 15] Joy to the earth the Savior brings. Let men their songs employ. Wild fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains.

Repeat the sounding joy. Repeat the sounding joy. Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

No more the sins and sorrows flow. Nor thorns invest the ground.

He comes to make his blessings flow. Far as the curse is found. Far as the curse is found.

Far as, far as the curse is found. Far as, far as the curse is found.

[3 : 39] Found him with many crowns. The lamb upon his throne. Hark how the heavenly anthem drowns.

A music but its own. Awake my soul and sing.

Of him who died for thee. And hail him as thy matchless King.

Through all eternity. Crown him the Son of God.

Before the world began. And he who tread where he has trod. And he who tread where he has trod.

[4 : 37] And he who tread where he has trod. And him the Son of heaven. Who every grief and all.

That rips the human breast. And takes and bears them for his own.

And all in him they best.

has died for me. Thy praise and glory shall not fail throughout eternity.

Crown him the Lord of life who triumphed for the grave and rose victorious in the strife for those he came to save.

[6 : 11] His glory shall we sing who died and rose on high who died eternal life to bring and lips that deathly died.

Crown him the Lord of life one with the Father, Lord one with the Spirit, Lord.

Amen. His reign shall not go back and round his fears in me.

Their lords of paradise extend and regret is ever sweet.

You may be seated. Good morning, church.

[7 : 38] This morning's scripture reading is 2 Corinthians 4, verses 7-15, found on page 907 in your pew Bibles.

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

We are afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not driven to despair, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed, always carrying in the body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake so that the life that Jesus also, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh so death is at work in us but life in you.

Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, I believe and so I spoke. We also believe and so we also speak.

[8 : 52] Knowing that we who raise the Lord Jesus will raise us also will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.

For it is all for your sake so that as grace extends more and more to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving to the glory of God.

Let us pray. Lord, in so many ways we can resonate with these verses afflicted in every way, perplexed, persecuted, struck down.

In so many ways we have these struggles internally as we go about our day, as we go about our lives, trying to figure out what it all means, Lord.

As we seek to follow you, as we seek to gather in community, Lord. We so many times deal with these things in secret.

[10 : 09] We are afflicted and beset by the many sins that we hold on to as we fear change in our lives, as we fear the ways in which you are sanctifying us and trying to call us back to yourself, Lord.

That we may see and savor your son, the life of Jesus, that it may be sweet to us, that it may appeal to us, and that through calling us back to yourself, Lord, may we feel the triumph of these verses of not being crushed, of not being driven into this affair, not being forsaken, Lord.

That in all these things we'd be looking back to you, that we'd be reflecting on these verses in the many ways in which it shows how to rest in you is the better choice, Lord, and that we'd be able to believe that in our own hearts and come back to you.

It's in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. If you, in praying along with Antoine, were confessing your sins in the hope that God would forgive you because of what Jesus did, I want to offer you this word of assurance from the passage of the title we'll be sharing with us later, that that hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

So, we will continue worshiping now through giving if the ushers would come forward. We give as part of our worship first because if we have food and clothing, the Bible teaches us to be content with that and so we want to recognize God's faithfulness in providing for us and tell him that it is more than enough what he has given to us.

[12 : 24] Second, because we recognize that even in our congregation that is not true for everyone and we want to share the blessings God's given us with others. And third, because we know that after those very urgent physical needs, our greatest need is the wisdom that God gives us through his word and through the teaching that we receive each week here in church.

And so we want to support the pastors and staff that are meeting our deep spiritual needs. So let's come together, let's sing together in worship and also give together through the offering plates.

If you are not a regular member here, please feel no obligation to give. We want you to be a guest here and we are so thrilled that you've come. Thank you. There is a hill I cherish
Where stood a precious tree
The gift of glory
How is it I should profit
While he is crucified
Yet as his life was taken
So I was granted love

My wealth is in the cross
There's nothing more I want
Than just to know his love
My heart is set on cross
And I will count all else as loss
The greatest of my crowns
Means nothing to me now
For I counted up the cost
And all my wealth is in the cross
I will not boast in riches
I have no pride in hope
But I will boast in Jesus
And in his name

I will only stand well
But I will not boast in the cross
There's nothing more I want
Than just to know his love
Then just to know his love
My heart is set on cross
And I will count all else as loss
The greatest of my crowns
Means nothing to me now
For I counted up the cost
And all my wealth is in the cross
And all my wealth is in the cross
And when I said in glory
My crowns before the Lord
Let

this be my confession

[16 : 09] My wealth is in the cross My wealth is in the cross There's nothing more I want Than just to know his love Than just to know his love My heart is set on cross And I will count all else as loss The greatest of my crowns Means nothing to me now For I counted up the cost And all my wealth is in the cross There's nothing more I want Than just to know his love My heart is set on cross And I will count all else as loss The greatest of my crowns Means nothing to me now For I counted up the cost

And all my wealth is in the cross And all my wealth is in the cross And all my wealth is in the cross My wealth is in the cross And all my wealth is in the cross.

You may be seated. If you are visiting with us, or if you have a prayer request that you would like our pastors and staff to be praying for you, you'll find in the pew in front of you a white card like this, though hopefully yours is not scribbled all over because my twins got a hold of the pen.

But you can fill that out. That will let us reach out to you. We would love to welcome you to hear where you're coming from, to answer your questions about the church, or just to share with you in the struggles you're going through and pray with you there.

I have just a very few announcements. January 4th this week we will have a members' meeting. There is, if you did not get the agenda or minutes through your email, you can find hard copies in the back of the church.

[18 : 42] But this will be a special time for us just to come together as a congregation, particularly to pray for the year ahead. So we would welcome anyone, certainly all members, to join us for that time.

There are art exhibits that have been going on. I believe they're on pause today, but they will continue next Sunday after the service.

You can enjoy the way that the artists in our congregation can bless us with their different interpretations of different biblical themes. And there is a new exhibit that will be starting in February, I believe.

And so particularly in the last art exhibit, we were a little late in encouraging parents to have their children submit. So this is a reminder for any parents.

This is a good time to have your children submit artwork for that exhibit. You'll find more details of that in the weekly email. And if you don't know about the weekly email, that is our best way for staying in touch together.

[19 : 36] So again, you can just put in the weekly, on this white card that you'd like to sign up for that weekly email, and we'll make sure that that happens, what to do with the white card. There are boxes, both the front and back entrances, that you can put those in, or you can give them to any of the pastors or staff.

Finally, in that weekly email, if you're looking for ways to serve, there are a number of opportunities, ranging from clearing the snow, should we have any snow this winter, to mentorship opportunities and serving with Bridges of Hope.

So we'd love for you to know about those, to pray for those who are participating, and to see where the Lord is calling you to share the gifts he's given you. With that, I would like to move on to some time praying for our congregation.

If you would bow your heads with me. Lord, I think more about the verse I read earlier, that hope in you does not put us to shame.

Lord, I thank you so much for that promise. One of the primary ways in which you save us, and reasons for which you save us, is to save us from our shame.

[21 : 00] And you know very well what our shame is like. Lord, when you came to earth, you saw people with all different types of shame.

You saw people sick with leprosy, or the woman who is bleeding, who had done nothing wrong, but were outcast by society, and knew the shame of being considered and treated like they were unworthy to be around other people.

And you came to save them from that shame. And you knew the shame that John the Baptist felt when he was unjustly imprisoned, and was slandered and accused of things that he had done that were not wrong, and yet he was treated as if he were guilty.

And the doubts he had about you yourself, when you didn't save him in the ways he expected you to.

And you publicly stood up and defended him to all those who doubted whether he was doing right. You know that sort of shame when we feel like we're being treated for doing things we have not done.

[22 : 24] And very deeply, Lord, you know the shame we feel when we have done wrong. Your word says that on the cross you became sin for us.

You embodied all of our shame so that we would not have to bear it any longer. And as we think back on the year that has passed, the different struggles we've had, the different successes we've had, the prayers that were answered, and the prayers that we have not seen answered as we expected.

There are so many things that we carry forward with us into 2024. But I pray that nobody in this congregation would carry forward with them any shame.

Whether it is perceived and societal, whether it is unjust accusations, or whether it is well-founded guilt for things they have done, that I have done, we look to you for forgiveness and healing because that is who you are, the God who died in order to forgive us, the God who is so full of healing that we cannot draw close to you and not feel that.

So for all the believers here this morning, I pray that they would rest on your promises. For all those who have come to this church service seeking you, not knowing what they believe and just investigating, I pray that they would find here, not in us, but in you, Jesus Christ, the comfort that they long for, the freedom from shame, not the lies they can find in so many other places in this city that tell them that their shame is not real or tell them that if they just do enough good works, that will counteract their shame, but the real forgiveness from the just and holy God who is abounding in mercy nonetheless.

[24 : 51] We thank you that you love us in these ways and pray that in the coming year our hearts will be filled day after day with new songs of worship.

In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. At this time, children age two and under can be dismissed. The other children will stay in the pews as this is another, three and under, will be dismissed.

Other children will stay in the pews as this is a family Sunday. And if you would rise and we'll continue singing to worship the Lord. Out of the depths I cry to you In darkest places I will call Incline your ear to me anew And hear my cry for mercy, Lord Were you to count my sinful ways How could I come before your throne Yet full forgiveness meets my gaze I stand redeemed by grace alone

I will wait for you I will wait for you On your words I will rely I will wait for you Surely wait for you Till my soul is satisfied So put your hope in God alone Take courage in His power to save Completely and forever won By Christ By Christ emerging to all be raised I will wait for you I will wait for you On your words

I will rely I will wait for you Surely wait for you Till my soul is satisfied His steadfast love has made a way And God Himself has made a price That all who trust in Him today Find healing in His sacrifice I will wait for you I will wait for you On your words I will rely I will rely I will wait for you Surely wait for you Till my soul is satisfied I will wait for you

[28 : 24] I will wait for you I will wait for you Through the storm and through the night I will wait for you Surely wait for you For your love is my delight I will wait for you I will wait for you I will wait for you I will wait for you On your word I will rely I will rely I will wait for you I will wait for you Surely wait for you you for your love is my delight.

Be seated. Well, good morning.

Parents, feel free to get up and move around. It is fitting that we come to God's Word on the eve of a new year. And as I reflected and prayed about an appropriate text, Romans 5 continually came to mind.

We will be looking at this great text this morning. And Lord willing, we will continue our series in Revelation next week. Let's go to the Lord in prayer asking Him for help.

Father, as we approach your Word, by your Spirit would our boast be in Christ alone, because of His great love for us. To discuss your great love in this chapter is to gaze into your very heart, Lord.

[30 : 21] Your love is infinite, limitless, boundless, eternal. Oh Lord, would Christ be exalted by your Holy Spirit. Would you give us a fresh sense of this great love this morning.

In Christ's name we pray. Amen. Almost 25 years ago, Christopher Wallace, also known as the notorious B.I.G., was gunned down in a drive-by shooting in L.A.

He was a well-known rapper who was involved with a notoriously violent gang. Two months after his death, with close friends and family grieving, a well-known tribute song came out by Puff Daddy. It had these words. Reminisce some time, the night they took my friend. Try to black it out, but it plays again. And the song ends this way.

One glad morning, when this life is over, I know I'll see your face. An expression of every grieving heart.

[31 : 34] For pain and sorrow to flee away forever, and the sun rising on one glad morning. The question I want to ask you is, how did he know with certainty?

Can you and I ever be certain about these things? If so, on what basis? Well, the text before us will answer this question.

Let me invite you to turn to Romans 5, verses 1 to 11. That can be found on page 886 of the Pew Bibles in front of you. Now let's read God's word together.

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, but we rejoice in our sufferings. Knowing that suffering produces endurance.

[32 : 37] 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 still 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 still 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. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

This is God's word. Now these are some of the greatest verses in the Bible. Romans is the greatest letter ever written.

[33 : 54] It rises as a Mount Everest across the terrain of the New Testament. As all roads lead to Rome, in my experience, every Bible study at Trinity inevitably leads to the book of Romans.

And to understand the New Testament, you must understand this book. Paul wants to set before the church in Rome the great truths of the gospel of free grace.

And this glorious grace flows from the heart of the great God of the universe. And Paul has gotten so caught up teaching about this glorious good news that he can't help but take a detour to explain how it bears fruit in our lives.

And the fruit is assurance and a certain hope of future glory. The main theme of this soaring text is found in verse 2. We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

Now when we use the word hope, it means maybe. Wishful thinking. For Paul, this is a certainty. Paul wants you to see that in Christ you have a certain hope that is unwavering.

[35 : 02] A rock solid assurance of salvation. And we look at this text in three parts. Point number two.

Assurance is the fruit of the furnace of suffering in verses 3 to 5. And finally, assurance is firmly fixed because of God's great love for you, Christian, in verses 6 to 11.

The foundation of justification by faith alone, the fruit of suffering and fixed because of God's love for you. And verse 1 is the fountain from which every blessing flows.

Paul declares, Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. To have a strong assurance, this is the foundation.

To be justified by faith. This is the theme and center of this great book. This is the solid ground to build your house upon. And from this foundation, Paul begins to construct a skyscraper.

[36 : 14] A Mount Everest of confidence and assurance that reaches its height in Romans 8. In that great chapter, Paul declares that in Christ there is no condemnation, no separation, and no defeat.

And this all begins with justification by faith. This is the ground of our acceptance before God.

Before we dive in to understand what Paul means by this phrase, we should pause and realize, it's

not whether you seek justification, but where.

It's either something or someone. This is the basis by which you think others will accept you. You and I seek to justify our existence somehow.

To feel your life has meaning. And depending on how you answer this question, it shapes your identity in the world. Where are you seeking justification this morning?

Well, I'm going to ask you a question to help you answer that. The first thing that comes to mind, are you ready? What's the first thing that comes to mind when I ask you this question? Here it is.

[37 : 20] To me, to live is what? Amen. The first thing that pops into your mind is your answer. Paul defined his life by saying, to me, to live is Christ.

Can you say the same? Are you so satisfied in Christ that you would define your life in this way?

Now, the scripture says there are really only two answers. Two options.

In God, or what the scripture calls idolatry. Idolatry takes a thousand forms. Career, convenience, treasures, or titles. In our therapeutic culture, we are constantly told the true ground of our acceptance is self-acceptance.

Authenticity to live out your feelings. But no one ever tells you which part of yourself, at what stage of your life, you're supposed to be authentic to. But we in the church know idolatry doesn't always come through the front door, but it sneaks in the back door.

Have I read the Bible enough? Have I prayed enough? Am I generous enough? How's my ministry going? Paul says true peace comes not from inside of us, but outside.

[38 : 29] Paul declares at the end of verse one, it is through our Lord Jesus Christ. The Prince of Peace is the foundation and fountain of this peace with God.

And this peace flows from justification by faith. Paul has spent the first four chapters explaining these great truths. To understand justification, you must first know that there is one that rises above you.

Paul wants to bring you into the courtroom of heaven where the divine judge is presiding.

Justification is related to God's role as judge over all the earth.

And God demands righteousness. As the creator, you and I will ultimately give an account to him.

The judge is omniscient.

He is the perfect, impartial fact-finder in a court of law. And the bad news is there is indisputable video evidence of our crimes.

[39 : 30] All things will be exposed to the eyes of whom we must give an account. There is worse news. God is good and you and I are not. Paul began the letter with a divine bill of indictment.

Criminal charges have been brought against you and I in the heavenly tribunal. Paul proclaims in Romans 3, none is righteous, no, not one. You and I have committed treason against a good God. Falling short of the glory of God. And we are dead in our trespasses. Slaves to sin. Powerless to save ourselves. Our best works are about filthy rags.

In our natural state, we are like those who climb onto a lightning rod in a thunderstorm, cursing God to his face. We deserve God's good and right condemnation.

And it would be good and right for God, for the divine judges gavel to come down with a guilty verdict. Condemned forever. The greatest question is how can sinners like us be declared righteous before a holy God?

[40 : 38] But the good news is this, friends. That what God demands, Christ supplies. The Father sends his own Son, the Lord Jesus.

What God demands, Christ fulfills. Christ not only lives the perfect life of perfect obedience, but on the cross, he experiences the horrors of hell and damnation in our place.

Verse 8 puts it best. But God shows his love for us in that while we're still sinners, Christ died for us.

He voluntarily lays his life down, taking the sentence of judgment in our place, in the place for all who would have returned from their sin and put their trust in him alone.

And on the third day, he rises from the dead for our justification and ascends to glory. And now, justification is an unexpected declaration from a gracious God.

If you trust in the risen Christ, the divine gavel comes down. It is a once-for-all verdict over your life.

The divine judge of the earth has declared the guilty sinner to be righteous.

[41 : 53] A full, free, and eternal pardon for past, present, and future sins. There is no appellate court to overturn this judge's ruling.

The court in heaven is of the highest jurisdiction. And this is no probation sentence. No waiting period to get your record expunged. The charges are dropped with extreme prejudice never to be brought up again.

Case closed. Your sins he remembers no more. And Christ's righteousness is reckoned to you. Your very worst transferred to Christ and his very best transferred to you.

We have an all-sufficient advocate who pleads his own righteousness in our place, in the divine tribunal. A champion who has fought the battle for us.

And this ruling leads to peace with God. And this is not a peace of God. This is a peace with God. When you are justified by faith, you and God have been at war, but now in Christ you are at peace.

[43 : 06] Not a mere tranquility of mind, but the end of hostility. It's an objective reality for every person in Christ. And this is all done by faith.

Now, faith is not only an intellectual assent. It is not the ability to define justification by faith with the precision of a surgeon's scalpel.

No, faith is a wholehearted trust. Faith is the empty hand receiving the fullness of Christ. Faith is resting upon Christ.

It is not the power of your faith that saves. A weak faith can still rest on the perfect sacrifice. It's all of God. It's all of grace.

You'll remember how Paul describes his own salvation in Philippians 3. Paul's confidence used to be in his religious credentials. Before he met Christ on the balance sheet of his soul, he thought he had more assets than liabilities.

[44 : 11] He sought to establish his own righteousness. But after he met Christ on the asset column, he writes, Christ alone. Everything else he considered his loss.

He learned that one is justified by faith, by grace. In fact, we need the same attitude that Paul had. That we would stand upon Christ alone as our righteousness.

And note the verb tense of the word justify in verse 1. This legal declaration doesn't happen in the future. It is something that God has already declared for every single Christian.

God is no longer a judge who condemns us, but a loving Father who adopts us. Now, some of you may have been taught that this is a novelty invented during the Reformation.

A theological innovation. Well, friend, if that were true, that would be a devastating criticism. But that misunderstands the stream of church history.

[45 : 16] Understand, at the time of the Reformation, the church was more medieval than it was patristic. The Reformers were recovering the apostolic teaching and that of the early church fathers.

Listen to John Chrysostom, an important early church father in the fourth century. Commenting on Ephesians 2.11, he writes, For by faith alone he saved us.

Elsewhere, his commentary on the book of Romans, he writes this, For when a man is once a believer, he is straight away justified. For you do not achieve it by toilings and labors, but you receive it by a gift from above.

Every Christian throughout history would say, yes, amen. Not our merits, not our works, not our efforts. Christ alone secures our salvation.

Jeremiah said, the Lord will be our righteousness. Isaiah uses the image of white garments. In chapter 62, he declares, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness.

[46 : 17] That's justification. He covers us in a robe of Christ's righteousness. But we understand that not all who profess Christ outwardly truly possess Christ inwardly.

We know that. The scripture repeatedly warns of counterfeit Christians walking in a presumption of salvation. If justification is the fire, then sanctification is the heat.

If there's no heat, there's no fire. One who is declared righteous will inevitably walk in righteousness. Not perfectly, but sincerely.

The Holy Spirit takes out your heart of stone and puts in a heart of flesh to walk in newness of life. The good tree will bear good fruit, Jesus said. And that's what the book of James is all about.

But wonderfully, we not only are justified and have peace with God, there's more. Christian, you are at the center of God's grace. Paul in verse 2 says, we obtain access by faith into this grace in which we stand.

[47 : 26] Now some say the word access here is referring to Christians being introduced by another. To a king in his royal chambers. Others say Paul is drawing upon the imagery from the day of atonement.

You now have access to the holy of holies. The place where God dwells. Either way, in Christ, you now have the privilege of full access to God as your loving Father.

This turns the world upside down. By a simple trust in Christ, those who sweep the floors have the same access to God as a seminary president.

And it's all by faith. Pause and think about the effect this truth had during the Reformation.

Purgatory and indulgences? Gone. A class of priests mediating access to God?

Gone. Tears of saints and super saints? Gone. And this gives dignity to our work. Now we can affirm each other's callings in life.

[48 : 32] From carpenters to cashiers to cardiologists. Every Christian has the same access to God. Oh, this is good news, friends.

For the world. We live in a world drowning in guilt. Inundated. The world doesn't know what to do with feelings of guilt. Some resort to self-help books.

Others drown their guilt through addictions. Others drown guilt by deflecting it and blaming someone else. Friends, we live in a world inundated with guilt.

Instead of the notion of getting right with an impersonal universe, we turn to a personal God. When the Holy Spirit opens your eyes to the dazzling reality of Christ's love, you begin to boast in Christ. In 2 Corinthians 10, Paul says, let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord. And here in verse 2, that word rejoice is the same word for boast.

[49 : 33] To rejoice in the glory of God is to boast in the Lord. A triumphant confidence that Christ is your all in all. And you will be with him in glory.

Here's a true test of your spirituality, friend. Are you amazed at the grace of God? Paul never got over it. He says in Galatians 2, The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me.

He has loved me. He gave himself up for me. He loved me. He never got over God's grace in his life. You can imagine someone saying, but Paul, how can you be so certain?

I can't be so certain. Sin always seems to be close at hand. I struggle. There are monsters and ogres that lurk in the shadow of my heart. I cry for freedom from sin.

I don't think I'm going to make it. You know, Paul knows our wayward hearts. He's saying, look, if you sincerely trust in Christ, God has done everything needed.

[50 : 42] You have been justified by faith. You are at peace with God and you are at the center of his grace with full access to the Father. We go from the grave to glory by the sovereign grace of God in Christ.

You cannot have assurance of salvation without first understanding these great truths. This is the foundation. But Paul doesn't stop there.

He says, not only that, but assurance is produced as a fruit of the furnace of suffering in verses 3 to 5. Verse 3 says, not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings.

Suffering is distress, pressure, affliction. Do you feel a tension between the word suffering and the word rejoice? Was Paul a lover of being in pain, preferring to walk around with rocks in his shoe?

No, I don't think so. I don't think so. James echoed the same thing. Count it all joy when you meet trials of various kinds. Paul wasn't rejoicing because of the suffering, but he rejoiced in it.

[51 : 46] He understood that Jesus was not exempt from suffering and neither are you and I. Now, church, I don't know what the new year holds for us. But I know two things are for certain.

One, God will be faithful. And two, you have a 100% chance of suffering. Real trouble. Real anguish. Dark clouds of discouragement for some of you.

Your life may be played in the minor key. The boxer Mike Tyson said it eloquently. Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth.

Life has a way of throwing left hooks and uppercuts when we least expect it. Losing your job, sickness, death, a close friend betraying you. God no word promises that you would be free from suffering, but he promises to sustain you.

Paul puts his hand on your shoulder and says, look, you can live within suffering with certainties. Every single ounce of suffering has been designed for your good. In verse 3, he says suffering produces endurance and character.

[52 : 53] We learn endurance. We don't throw in the towel, wave the white flag. We continually pick up our cross and every day finding our treasure in heaven.

The Christian life is sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. Not only endurance, but character. This is the idea to be tested, to be proven, to be tried, to be given the Job treatment.

You recall that Satan approached God and said, you know Job only worships you because you have given him all these things. Take it away and he will curse you. Job was tested, so he had this character about him.

Job would say, though he slay me, I will hope in him. In chapter 23, he said, when he has tried me, I will come out as gold. By the end, Job worshiped God because God was God.

And you notice this type of character in older, more mature Christians. This unshakable trust. These older saints are like trees with deep roots in the character of God.

[53 : 57] A tree that isn't blown away when the storm is raging. They have learned to stake their claim on trusting in God's character, even when the circumstances in their life argue they should do otherwise.

You know, younger Christian, you look around and say, you know, I want to grow. I want to have faith and love for God like these older saints.

That is a wonderful desire. God will answer your prayer. But don't be surprised if you start suffering. Suffering is God's way of separating you from the love of the world.

Suffering is like God stripping away layers of an onion to refine you. Every layer, everything you are tempted to lean on for support, he takes away. God is sending you trials because he is driving you to himself.

He wants you to learn to lean on him. Until all you have is Christ himself holding you up. And the everlasting love of God becomes your only hope.

[54 : 58] It is here when God drives you low that you learn that God's grace is sufficient for you. And this character produces hope.

God allows suffering and darkness so your hope can shine brighter. You know, the jeweler might take out a jewel in the sunlight and you shrug your shoulders and yawn.

It's a big deal. But then he puts the jewel on the black velvet and the jewel starts to come alive. God does the same thing. He puts suffering in darkness so your hope can shine brighter.

And this hope will never disappoint you, friend. Paul says it does not put you to shame. God is not taking you for a ride to be deceived.

He will never deceive you. God's word is always true. And in these moments the sovereign spirit will help you in your suffering. Paul puts it this way.

[55 : 54] God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. This is not a small trickle. A small sprinkling. The spirit pours out this love into your heart.

God's love is complete and perfect for every Christian. But God sometimes grants greater measures of this sense of his great love. The Holy Spirit awakens your heart to these glorious realities.

You are in a dark place. And the sun starts to shine in your soul. You feel dry and then you taste the rivers of living water.

You are given a joyous song to sing at midnight. You are given rest. Do you know of any of this?

The spirit pouring out his love. Have you been moved by the spirit? Your icy heart melted by the great love of God. Thomas Brooks said, Assurance is the experience of divine bliss this side of heaven.

[57 : 00] Assurance, he wrote, yields the soul to two heavens. One here and one there. One now and one later. A young girl in New Haven became blind at six weeks old.

People often told her, what a pity you can't see. She would reply, the first thing my eyes will ever see would be the face of Jesus in heaven. And this filled her with joy.

Her name was Fanny Crosby. And she would write in her famous hymn, Blessed Assurance, Jesus is mine. Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine.

God poured out his love into her heart. Friend, if nothing in your life is going well, but you know Christ, the spirit can do the same for you. This is a mark of true assurance.

But Paul doesn't stop there. To nail down assurance. Point number three, your assurance is firmly fixed because of God's great love for you in verses six to eleven.

[58 : 02] These verses are meant to strengthen our assurance. You notice the word for at the beginning of verses six, seven and ten are important. Paul is giving a reason for something.

Here, Paul takes out his magnifying glass. And it's as if he double clicks on the word love in verse five. Verses six to eleven are an explanation of this great love that has been poured into our hearts by the spirit.

Paul says, let me tell you about this extraordinary love that sustains you. In these verses, he is explaining the riches of the height, depth, length, and width of the love of God.

But friend, if you are here and you are not a Christian, we are glad you are here. But know that if verse one does not apply to you, if you have not been justified by faith in Christ, nothing past verse one applies to you.

You don't have peace with God. You will not find God to be loving, but only a God of wrath. You don't have any hope in suffering. The sufferings of this present time are just small tremors of a greater earthquake of suffering the Bible calls the second death.

[59 : 19] It is plain in verse nine, if you have not been justified by his blood, you are subject to the wrath of God. In the 1980s, geologists picked up warnings about the volcano Mount St. Helens would erupt.

For two months, the radio broadcast the warning to the people. And heeding the warning, people fled for their lives.

Police herded people to safety. But there was one man who refused to leave. He ignored the warnings. He appeared on national television.

He laughed, nobody knows more about this mountain than me, and it don't dare blow up on him. But it did. The mountain erupted, sending intensely hot ash a hundred stories high, sending concussive waves faster than the speed of sound in every direction.

The man and everything around him was crushed by the explosion. The man refused to listen to the warning, so he perished. This volcano would be like a child playing with a jack-in-the-box compared to the wrath of God on the horizon that Paul warns us of.

[60 : 34] God is a consuming fire. But see this great offer to be reconciled to God. You no longer need to be an enemy, but Jesus can make you God's friend and the lover of your soul.

Leave everything behind you and run into his arms. And trust your all to him. As it has been said, there is no refuge from him.

There is only refuge to be found in him. You must come to God acknowledging your helplessness.

And see this great love that he has shown. This is the highest form of love that has ever existed.

Paul in verse 6 says, The death of Christ did not happen for good people, but for sinners. For while we were still weak, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly.

Paul wants you to see that Christ did not die for the heroes, but for villains. God loved those who are unlovely.

[61 : 38] But Paul, surely a holy and righteous God would come for the godly. No, wonderfully Paul says, he came for the ungodly. The wicked, the vile, the unclean, the helpless.

Christ died for the worst people in the world. Do you come here with feelings that you are ungodly? Be encouraged, he has come for you. God doesn't say, you need to bring yourself to hate sin before you can come to me.

No, out of God's great love, Paul says, Christ died for us while we were weak. That word weak means we couldn't do anything for ourselves. We were the paralyzed man on the side of the road. We had no strength to escape the final judgment. There was no reason for God to set his love on us. We were blind to the truth. We couldn't even lift a finger to save ourselves.

But while we were still weak, at the right time, Christ came to die. This is the glory of God's love for us. While we were helpless, God the Son, the one whom angels worshipped, the glorious and faithful one, appeared in the form of a servant.

[62 : 51] He was spat upon, laughed at, mocked, had a crown of thorns twisted onto his head. If that were enough, he was lifted high upon a blood-stained cross.

Not for good people, but for guilty, hell-deserving enemies of God. The Father crushes his own Son, bearing the full weight of wrath.

Why? Why would he do that? Verse 8, because God loves you. This love is an infinite, never-ending love. This love is measureless.

This is a love that existed between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit from eternity past. And the love of God is beyond comprehension. Look around, Paul says, this love is greater than anywhere you can find in any human relationship.

Paul in verse 7 says, For one will scarcely die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die. Now, what's the difference between this righteous person and the good person?

[63 : 57] You can think of it in terms of a chef. Some chefs can follow the recipe, while others just have a little something extra. The righteous person follows the law. The good person has the right motivations.

Paul is saying, take the best person, and you still won't find people lining the door to die for them. Look at the beginning of verse 8. The two greatest words in the Bible.

But God. But God shows his love for us, and that while we're still sinners, Christ dies for us. There is no greater love than this. The King of Grace died for the worst people in the world.

You know, it's hard to bear a grudge against your brother and sister when you're sitting at the foot of the cross, surveying the Prince of Glory being crucified for you. It's hard not to forgive your brothers and sisters.

What does this love have to do with assurance? The key is in the words, in the words, much more. I would underline those words in this chapter. Verse 9, much more, Paul says, having been justified by his blood, shall we be saved from the wrath of God.

[65 : 04] Again in verse 10, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. Do you see how the much more works in this chapter? Paul's point is, look, if God has done the hard part, he will do the easy part.

As someone said, he that was willing to expend his son's blood to gain them will not deny his power to keep them. Let me illustrate this for you.

Parents, use your discretion on this one, but there's a recent movie called Guy Ritchie's The Covenant. And the movie takes place in the war zone in Afghanistan, about an American soldier and his companion, an Afghan interpreter.

While in hostile territory, the soldier landed on the Taliban's most wanted list. Ambushed, the soldier found himself wounded, helpless, and weak.

Unable to get back to safety. But at great cost, his companion, the Afghan interpreter, took extraordinary steps to save the soldier's life. Not only did he risk his own life by hiding the man from the Taliban, but in tears and dehydration, the interpreter dragged the concussed and bleeding soldier over endless miles under the desert sun.

[66 : 23] Giving what little water he had in the desert to keep the soldier alive. Now suppose that the soldier is now back in safety. The soldier turns to his friend and says, look, I am weak.

Would you help me get on the plane so I can safely get home? Will the interpreter now say no?

Look at what he's already done! Of course he's going to say yes!

Look at what God has already done for you. He's done the hardest thing in sacrificing his son to reconcile his enemies. How much more shall he save us now that we're his friends?

Much more! Yes, he will! In love, the Father sent the Son. In love, the Son died for you while you were still an enemy. In love, he justified you.

And the Father now loves you with the very love he has for his own Son. You are at peace. You are at the center of God's grace. In love, he is sanctifying you. In love, he will keep you.

[67 : 26] Jude 24 says, Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy. Paul in Romans 8 circles back around and says, He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

In Philippians 1, he says, I am sure of this. I am sure of this. That he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Not everyone who professes Christ truly possesses Christ, but everyone who truly possesses him will persevere in him. He is able to keep you in the race until you reach the finish line.

So Christian, your assurance does not depend on your love for God, but his love for you. Those whom he receives, he always keeps.

He has never lost a single person and he is not about to start now. Your hope is secure because God's love for you is secure.

[68 : 32] Paul and saying we rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Loved so perfectly, we rejoice in God. This is our boast.

The anthem of the redeemed in heaven. In our new year, this is our anchor. This will be the song on your deathbed. Death is an open door where we will be given a greater song to sing.

Christian, he is not weary of you. From the grave to glory, he will love you until the end. We've tasted this love in part and we'll drink it more fully in glory.

Infinitely better than any pleasure on earth. This love will not fail. When God takes hold of you by grace, he will never let you go.

Let's pray. Father, the great love for us in Christ, let that be our strength, our boast, our anthem.

[69 : 32] That you have loved us while we were weak and helpless and you will love us until the end. Well, Father, fill our hearts with the Holy Spirit, this love that you have shown us. Would our hearts be poured out.

Would your love be poured out into our hearts, Father. For your great, by your grace, for your glory. In Jesus name, amen. Amen. Well, with the music team come up, we are going to sing It Is Well With Our Soul.

Please stand if you're able. Or If Our Children's Mor■■■ Madness When peace like a river attendeth my way, When sorrows like sea billows grow, Whatever my heart thou hast taught me to say, It is well, it is well in my soul.

It is well, it is well with my soul.

It is well, it is well with my soul.

[71 : 38] No season should not be, no trials should come, Let this earth's assurance control.

That Christ has rewarded my heart, That's a state that hath shed, It is well, it is well with my soul.

It is well, it is well, it is well with my soul.

It is well, it is well with my soul.

My sin, O the bliss of this glory has stopped, My sin, O the bliss of this glory has stopped, It is well, it is well with my soul.

[73 : 29] It is well, it is well with my soul. It is well, it is well with my soul.

It is well, it is well with my soul.

And Lord, peace of this glory, When the day shall be signed, The clouds be rolled back as a storm.

Our trump shall be signed, And the Lord shall be signed, It is well, it is well with my soul.

It is well, it is well with my soul. It is well, it is well, it is well with my soul.

[75 : 02] It is well, it is well with my soul.

It is well, it is well, it is well with my soul.

Amen, church. Well, let me send you off with this benediction As we look forward into the new year.

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you blameless before the presence of his glory With great joy.

To the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority Before all time and now and forever. And all of God's people said, Amen!

Go in peace, brothers and sisters. Good y■■■■■■ how amazing Jesus. Thank you.

[76 : 48] Thank you.