



An Overview of Paul's Letter to the Romans

(5) Celebration and Theology (go together)

Romans 5

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This is sermon number 5 of an overview of the letter of Paul to the Romans. And since we are taking one chapter at a time, this morning our text is chapter 5. This chapter begins a new section in this letter. We have seen that the largest part of chapters 1-3 dealt with the need for salvation, which is human sin and the resulting just wrath of God. Then we looked at the second part of chapter 3 and chapter 4 which begins Paul's treatment of the good news which can be summarized by the term justification by faith. Justification by faith means that through believing in Jesus, sinners are forgiven their sins and credited with Christ's perfect righteousness which he obtained by his perfect life and sacrificial death on the cross. So, we have covered chapters 1-4.

Chapters 5-8 are often considered to be a separate section of the letter, although different scholars divide the book in different ways. For our purposes it is good enough to consider this as a new section and say that it builds on what has come before, but it deals with a number of different matters all further explaining the gospel. This is a further explanation of the good news or the gospel of salvation. Paul has covered sin. He has covered the basic idea that we become right with God through faith in Jesus and what he has done for us and not by works. Now he is going to deal with some other aspects of salvation. In chapter 5 we have two main sections. Verses 1-11 are kind of celebratory, but they also make some new points. And verses 12-21 give some very important background theology for our deeper

understanding of both the bad news of sin and death and the good news of salvation in Christ.

Verse 1 of chapter 5 gives a summary conclusion from what has been said so far. It begins with the word “therefore” which means that it is a conclusion that follows from what comes before the word “therefore.” So, we have all this talk about sin and then the righteousness of God which is given to believers as a gift and then we read, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” This is a wonderful verse – a great verse to memorize. It is the heart of the gospel in a nutshell. Those who believe in Jesus have peace with God. Since the alternative to peace with God is war with God, peace with God is a very very precious thing.

Peace is a precious thing in general. Think of the horrible misery and suffering that war causes. And then when there is peace, people celebrate in the streets. Think of the horrible misery and suffering that is caused by conflicts between people which do not involve guns and bombs, but still cause untold misery – family conflicts, church conflicts, conflicts in society. What a precious thing peace is!

Here we have the most important peace of all – peace with God. Since the source of the deepest human happiness and joy is a loving relationship with God, peace with God is an absolute necessity for true human wellbeing. And that is what flows from the gospel.

Verse 2 continues in a similar vein of dwelling on the wonderful reality of those who are righteous before God through faith in Jesus. “Through him we have also obtained access by faith into his grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” Faith is the key that gives us access. And the place to which it gives us access is the grace of God. Christians stand in the grace of God. Grace is undeserved favor. We stand in the favor of God. God’s face shines with favor and we are standing in the middle of that favor. When God looks at us he is smiling. His eyes are warm. And he is pleased with us. We have not earned this, but we have received it by faith for Jesus sake.

Now this is something to think about – to meditate about. This is something to dwell on. It is something to bask in. Just think of how

precious it is when people we love, and respect look at us with favor. This is one of the most precious delights of life. This is part of the reason that loving relationships are so wonderful. There are people who love us, who care for us, who are pleased when they see us. This gives joy in a very deep place within us.

Well the favor of God is like that but goes beyond it because we are designed to find our deepest joy in loving God and being loved by him. We never experience that perfectly in this life, but when we are saved we experience the beginning of this and with spiritual growth comes a deeper experience and appreciation of standing in the grace of God. And it begins with believing that when we believe in Jesus, we have “obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand.” Knowing this is deep joy.

But he continues, “and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” Hope is a very important concept in the Bible and in the gospel. Hope has to do with a good future. Hope as to do with the future and it has to do with a future that is going to be better than the present. Hope is an important part of a good life. We are always looking forward. That is how we are designed. And when the future looks promising, we have hope. If the future does not look promising, it is difficult to move into that future.

The hope that Paul mentions here is the glory of God. The glory of God is an important idea in this letter. In 1:23 we read of sinners exchanging the “glory of God” for images. In 3:23 we read that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” And now here we read that those who are justified by faith “rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” What Paul is speaking about here is the glory that will come from God at the end of this age when believers will be glorified. That is the culmination of our salvation. We will be without sin and we will share in God’s glory. So, believers will have moved from falling short of the glory of God to sharing in the glory of God – all because of God’s grace to undeserving sinners, received through faith and based on what Jesus has done for us.

Now so far in his treatment of the good news Paul has not said to much about trouble and struggle. Only in the last chapter he has spoken about the difficulty of faith because it means believing in something that is

humanly impossible. Other than that, the news has been positive – we are right with God – God is looking upon us in favor – that is the most precious blessing we can experience in this life.

However, while we are in this life we are not yet in heaven and that means that there is still suffering. Even though we are right with God through faith in Jesus, we are not yet done with suffering. We still must suffer, but suffering is transformed. Paul speaks of this next. “Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character and character produces hope...”

So, we must still suffer, but Paul tells us that there can be joy in suffering. The reason that we can have joy in suffering is that it has a positive purpose in the lives of the justified. Suffering for God’s people is not punishment. Jesus has taken care of that. Rather God transforms suffering into a means of spiritual growth. Suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character.

Now this is very, very significant from a number of perspectives. One of the questions that justification by faith and not by works raises is “What about obedience? What is the role of obedience and holy living? If Christ has taken the penalty for our law-breaking and if Christ has kept the law in our place, are we free to live as we please?” Instinctively we know that that is not so. But the way to obedience is one of the glories of the gospel. We will be exploring this idea in more detail in the chapters that follow, but for now notice that the law of God and the threat of punishment are no longer the most prominent drivers of obedience. The punishment has been paid by Jesus and the Jesus has kept the in our place and that means that the law plays a very different role in obedience than we might expect.

What is our normal way of thinking about producing obedience? We lay down the law and we threaten punishment. A child is in danger of putting his toe over the line. What are we inclined to do? Lay down the law and threaten punishment. This scenario is not completely gone in the gospel, but it is much less prominent, because the punishment has been paid and because we already have Jesus’ perfect obedience on our account with God.

Now here is where I am going with this. Notice in verse 4 that Paul speaks of character. Character goes together with obedience. Christian character is habitual obedience. So, when Paul speaks of character that includes the idea of obedience and holy living. But notice that in verses 3 and 4, character does not come from the law and it does not come from the threat of punishment, it comes from suffering that produces endurance and it is possible to rejoice in this suffering when we understand that God is using it for a good purpose in our life.

This is one of the glorious things about the gospel. The outworking of the gospel in our lives will be obedience. We will begin to obey in this life. We will make progress. And one day we will be perfect. But obedience does not come from the law. The law still has some role in obedience, as we will see, but there are other things that are much more prominent. And here we see that one of the things that God uses in the lives of his people to shape their character is suffering leading to endurance.

Now this does not turn suffering into non-suffering. By definition suffering is painful. It still hurts, but it takes its meaning from the gospel. It is not punishment. It is now a means that God uses to train us to produce endurance and to mold our character to become more like Jesus. That is the case for severe suffering, but it is also the case for the relatively minor suffering of frustrations and setbacks. They are purposeful. They become part of the gospel. God is using them to produce endurance and character. And that is why Paul speaks of “rejoicing in our sufferings.”

I must deal more quickly with the rest of this section to verse 11. As I have said, it is celebratory. So, we will cover it in a celebratory way. Paul is exulting in a number of the wonderful things that are part of the good news. In verse 5 he speaks of the subjective experience of the love of God that the Holy Spirit gives. “[H]ope 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.” Those who believe in Jesus, receive the Holy Spirit. From other parts of Scripture, we learn that the Holy Spirit actually comes into our hearts to give us faith in the first place, but Paul is not always precise about the order of things in salvation and

so here he just celebrates that believers have received the Holy Spirit and that the Holy Spirit pours the love of God into our hearts. And that subjective experience of God's love is a confirmation of our hope. One of the ways that we know that our hope is a solid hope that will not put us to shame on the last day is the subjective experience of the love of God. That is not the only confirmation of salvation, as we will see later on in this letter, but it is one of them. The Holy Spirit pours God's love into our hearts and when that happens we know that we will not be put to shame at the final judgment.

Now lest this be a discouragement rather than an encouragement let me say that the moment you are speaking about inner experience you are in an area of vagueness and variation. Furthermore, whenever we are seeking to understand the experience of salvation, we must take into account the fact that it is always imperfect during this life. There is always what is known as "the already" and the "not yet" – what has happened so far and what remains to be experienced in time and at the end of time. Therefore, the experience of God's love being poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, will be different from person to person and at different times in any one person's life. Some people tend to experience their emotions very intensely. Others not so much. All of that must be taken into account when we are thinking of something like God's love being poured into our hearts. For some that might be an overwhelming experience. For others something much more subtle and subdued. But for all who believe in Jesus there will be some apprehension of God's love. And whether that is an overwhelming experience or something more quietly experienced, it is a glorious thing to feel God's love in our hearts.

Verses 6-11 continue Paul's celebratory reflection on the good news. "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly." There is so much here that we could dwell on, but let me just quickly mention the phrase, "at the right time." It's so easy to pass over a phrase like that, but it is a reminder that the whole plan of salvation is being orchestrated by God and unfolded by God bit by bit with everything happening at just the right time. Christ came at just the right time. Christ died at just the right time. And we can be sure that Christ will come again at just the right time. This is our security as Christians.

No matter what happens and how bad things might look, God is unfolding his plan – it is a good and perfect plan – it incorporates the suffering of his people and everything happens at just the right time.

Paul then reflects on the fact that Jesus gave his life for us by comparing Jesus' sacrifice to something that does happen occasionally in human history. Sometimes one person will give his life for another. This is not an everyday occurrence, but sometimes a parent will give her life to save a child or a soldier will use his body to shield his friend, giving his life and saving his friend. But when this happens, the person who was saved was a good person – someone precious to the one who made the ultimate sacrifice. But with Jesus, his life was given for sinners. And sinners are rebels against God – despisers of God – enemies of God, as Paul will go on to say. This highlights something unique about Jesus' sacrifice. Jesus did not die for people who deserved to live. He gave his life for people who deserved to die - people who were rightly under the wrath of God – people who were obviously valued but at the same time repugnant to God because of their treachery and rebellion against God. That is you and me apart from salvation.

Now given the fact that Christ gave his life for us while we were his enemies, we can be all the more confident that he will save us in the end now that we have been reconciled to God. Given the fact that Christ gave his life for us while we were fighting against him, we can be sure that we will be saved by his life. It is wonderfully true that Christ's life saves us as well as his death. But the point Paul is emphasizing at this point is since Christ made the ultimate sacrifice for us while we were his enemies, we can be absolutely sure that we will be saved in the future. Scripture speaks of salvation in all three tenses, past, present and future and here Paul is saying that what has happened in the past gives us total confidence about being saved in the future when we stand before God at the final judgment.

We turn now to verses 12-21. In this section Paul gives some important theological background to all that he has covered so far in his treatment of the good news. He has talked about sin and the wrath of God. He has talked about justification by faith. He has reflected on the gospel in a celebratory way. And now he wants to increase our understanding of

both the sin-part of his message and the salvation-part of his message. And he gives us this perspective because it is helpful and necessary. This increases our understanding of sin and grace and sin and grace have to do with our relationship with God and our relationship with God is our most important relationship. So, understanding that better is vital. So, don't tune out just because this is theology.

In these verses, Paul teaches us how it came to be that we are sinners. Verse 12 "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned..." Here is the origin of sin and death, at least as far as God teaches us about it in his word. "[S]in came into the world through one man, [that is Adam. Sin came into the world when Adam sinned.] And that sin was the cause of death in the world. God had said to Adam and Eve that the day that they ate of the tree of the knowledge of God and evil, they would die. They did eat of that tree. That is why there is death in the world. Now the verse says something more. It is that Adam's sin did not only affect him and Eve. It spread. It was passed on. Not only did Adam and Eve die, so did every one of their offspring.

This is the biblical answer to the question of why there is sin and death in the world. The story in Genesis 3 gives us the answer as far as God wants us to know it. The Bible does not say much about why there was sin before that. Apparently, that is not something that we need to know much about. We know that it came into the world through Adam's sin and it passed to all of us from parent to child through the generations. Verse 12 even says that death spread to us all because we all sinned – that is we all sinned in Adam. The best way to understand this is through the idea of representation. Adam represented us when he sinned so that when he sinned we sinned and so we participate in the Adam's sin and its consequences.

The obvious question is whether that is fair. That is not something that the Bible discusses. The Bible insists that God is just and righteous and that he never does anything unjust, so it is fair that Adam represented us when he sinned. Since God is the standard of what is fair, we can be sure that it is fair that Adam represented us in his sin and so we are all born experiencing the consequences of Adam's sin.

And it is a good idea not to protest the idea of representation and this is why. Imagine God said, "OK, we will do away with the principle of representation." That would also be fair, but it would also mean we would have to bear our own sin, if we ended up sinning like Adam did. If there were no representation, we would not experience death because of Adam's sin, but it would also mean that if we ever did sin, no one could be our representative to save us.

That is the other side of the picture that Paul presents. Paul sums it up in verse 18 and 19, "Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience the many will be made righteous."

You see salvation in Jesus Christ depends on the idea of representation. Therefore, we should be very happy that God's idea of justice includes the idea of representation. We are born sinners because Adam represented us, but we are also saved through faith because Christ is our representative. Salvation in Christ is rooted in the idea of representation and the alternative is that we are on our own – no matter what. So, we can be glad that God has designed things in such a way that Jesus Christ is our representative and so his righteousness can become ours through faith in him.

So, this is an important part of the good news as well as an important part of the bad news about sin and death. This is an important part of the biblical world-view. A world-view is the answer we give to the most fundamental questions of human existence. Where did everything come from? What is the purpose of life? And among those fundamental questions that every world view must address is – what is the explanation of evil and death? This is the biblical answer. It fits very well with the evidence. People act the way that the Bible says that they do, and they are the way that the Bible says that they are. The biblical account is true to life.

But something the Bible also does is give the answer. A worldview must also answer the question of whether there is any hope. And the biblical worldview is all about hope. The situation that is the result of Adam's sin and our own sin, is very serious indeed. But the good news is very good

news. It is great news. It is that there is a way of salvation – a way to be reconciled to God – that God himself through Jesus has accomplished and that is received by faith and not through works, not through our own efforts, not through us earning our own way.

And because of that good news we can live with joy and hope even in suffering because the God who saves us loves us and uses everything that happens to us in life for our growth as his children.