

Romans 5:1-11

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[0 : 00] Well, let's turn back in our Bibles to the passage that's been already read this evening, Romans chapter 5, verses 1 to 11.

! I have been in this church and even on this spot, I don't know how many times, and I am yet to hear Paul Levy preach.

So I'm kind of tempted to say that I am subject to what John Calvin used to call a secret instinct of the Spirit, and just call him up to preach tonight.

But I do esteem Paul, I know it would embarrass him if I told you how much I esteem him, but he is a very dear friend and I'm grateful for the invitation to be with you and to enjoy praising God together.

Many years ago, an elderly lady in the congregation I served in Glasgow told me this story about her mother. Her mother was a very ordinary Glasgow working girl.

[1 : 25] She worked in a factory, but she was a young Christian, and at the door of the factory on Friday nights, which those of you who are at least septuagenarians or perhaps octogenarians will remember, Friday night was payday.

And every Friday night there would be a tramp at the gate of the factory. And this lady told me her mother would give her half a crown.

There's a children's address. Which, considering her pay packet was probably no more than two pounds, was a very generous gift.

And then the tramp died. And they discovered what she had not known, and he had not known, that he was actually a millionaire.

He had an inheritance that he had never claimed. And her two and sixpences on Friday nights had kept him going with a pie and a cup of tea, I imagine.

[2 : 34] And I remember when she told me this story years and years ago, I thought, what a parable of our Christian lives, that we are heirs to such rich grace.

And at least we would admit secretly to ourselves, and perhaps even be bold enough to admit it, to those that we trust most and love most, that we are among those who, as our forefathers used to say, live below the level of the privileges that we've been given in the gospel.

And it's very easy for us, I think, at least for me, if you have any kind of Celtic blood in you, it's natural for you to think about this and to beat yourself down.

The problem is that by beating yourself down, you never raise yourself up. And it strikes me, reading passages like Romans 5, 1, 2, 11, that this problem that there is for us in our Christian lives is not a uniquely contemporary problem, but it's one that in various different ways the Apostle Paul deals with in his letters.

As he draws, in every letter, as he draws people in to the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, he is in one way or another always setting before us the privileges that are ours, the riches that are ours in Jesus Christ, and seeking to lift us up into those privileges so that we may understand them, appropriate them, enjoy them, feast on them, and live them out.

[4 : 24] And we badly need this, don't we? We badly need the strong riches of the grace of God and the gospel to keep us afloat in the Christian life and to give us energy in the Christian life.

And it seems to me one of the places in which the Apostle does this is these verses we've read in Romans 5. Interestingly, they appear sandwiched by some of the heaviest logical, theological reasoning in all of the New Testament.

And there are these moments here in the middle of all this where it's as though he gives us just a moment of mental relief to say to us, savor what the power of the gospel produces in your life.

Savor the fruits of this powerful doctrine that I'm giving to you. And there are many ways in which we might work our way through this passage, but there is one way I think that's fairly obvious. There's something in this passage that seems to form something of a backbone to it or a spine to it. And it's the fact that first of all in verse 2 and then again in verse 3 and then again in verse 11, Paul uses an expression that holds his whole argument together.

[5 : 55] It is that we rejoice. In verse 2 that we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. In verse 3 that beyond that we even rejoice in our sufferings.

And then even beyond that, as he says in verse 11, more than that, we also rejoice in God himself through our Lord Jesus Christ.

And what is remarkable about the language he uses, you know there are some translations of the Bible where the translators have tried to use the same English word every time the same Greek word appears.

And it can be stilted, but it sometimes is helpful. And it's helpful for us here, I think, to realize that the verb Paul uses here for rejoice is the same verb he's used earlier on for boasting.

And the striking thing is that up until this point in Romans, boasting is a very bad and dangerous thing. Indeed, his argument right at the beginning of the letter from chapter 1 verse 18 to chapter 3 verse 20 is designed entirely to silence boasting.

[7 : 18] So that none of us will boast in our own accomplishments. And he even refers to Abraham at the beginning of chapter 4, the great figure of the patriarchs.

Abraham had nothing to boast in. And he's pulling us down. His conclusion is, before the judgment seat of God, every mouth is closed, everyone is guilty before God, and we are left silent without a boast.

But then in comes the gospel. And what the gospel does is to reverse that condition. And that's what he's picking up here.

It's the same verb. We might easily translate it. In verse 2, Through Christ we have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we boast, we exult in the hope of the glory of God. More than that, we even exult, boast in our sufferings. Even more than that, astonishingly, we exult and boast and rejoice in God Himself.

[8 : 30] And I want us just to parse these statements that Paul makes to try to take this in, that such is the sufficiency of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that it reverses our silence boasting and gives us something worth boasting about, something worth exulting in, and something therefore that creates a special atmosphere and spirit to our lives.

It may not be identical in each of us because our personalities are so varied, but there will be this sense of exultation because of what Jesus Christ has done for us.

So first of all, Paul says that because we are justified by faith and of peace with God and access into this grace in which we stand, we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

In fact, what he wants to put here front and center is justified. Justified therefore. That's his order. Justified therefore.

And what he's really saying to us is grasp this justified. Grasp that in Jesus Christ you are as righteous as Jesus Christ is before the Father.

[9 : 57] Grasp that the righteousness that is given to you in the gospel is therefore a righteousness that is perfect, that is irreversible, and that is eternal.

Grasp this. Grasp this. And the effect is that you begin to rejoice and to boast in the hope of the glory of God.

And as you bore down a little on this, you begin to realize that what Paul is doing here is not just reversing our silence boasting for a new boasting in the gospel, but he is transforming our relationship to the glory of God.

Remember what he says in chapter 3, verse 23. He says, Here is our fallen condition. All have sinned.

And, if I were finishing this sentence, I think 98% of the time I would say, All have sinned and broken the law of God.

[11 : 03] But, Paul actually says something that I think is really more profound. Not just that we have broken the law of God, but we have forfeited our destiny.

We were made for glory. We have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. So, here boasting that was silenced now becomes an exaltation of praise to God, and the loss of that glory has now

been restored.

Because we are justified. And he is wanting us to understand, dear brothers and sisters in Rome, he is saying, This is my gospel. That it is your justification that guarantees that you are able to rejoice in the glory of God.

Because you are destined to share it. You are destined to be with Jesus in answer to his prayer. That those you have given me may be with me where I am, to behold my glory that you gave me from before the foundation of the world.

This is our destiny because of this justification. Nothing can reverse it. It is constantly borne in upon me as I think about people in our congregations, that the newest baby Christian is just as justified, as perfectly justified, as finally justified, as irreversibly justified, as the greatest saint.

[12:43] And I would often like to bring in front of the congregation, even if it embarrassed them, the newest baby Christian and some saint who has suffered much, done much, served much.

A hero in the eyes of fellow Christians and placed them before us and say, Dear brothers and sisters, this little girl is no less finally justified than this saintly woman.

Because it doesn't depend on any of our accomplishments. And the masters of the spiritual life have known well enough, partly from their own experience, partly from their observation of others, that there is something in us that wants to make that the truth.

That we can be more justified. That the level of our sanctification or our service can add to our justification. Nothing can add to your justification.

Because it's not in you. It's in Him. And when we are delivered, this is one of Paul's burdens, when we are delivered from that native tendency to think, there is something I can do to contribute to my standing before God, which diminishes our sense of the glory of Jesus Christ, and discover that all our righteousness is in Him.

[14:12] You must have noticed that in the hymns we sing. All our righteousness is in Him. Christ is our righteousness. As John Bunyan discovered, and to his embarrassment, discovered it wasn't actually in the Bible.

That our righteousness is on high in heaven. And once we see that, it follows, doesn't it? It follows as night follows day.

It follows both logically and psychologically. That if this is true, then I am in this amazing position.

That I who forfeited the glory of God may now exalt in it, in the certainty in it.

May rejoice in it. May boast in it. Because it is the judgment on my life from the last day, brought forward into the life of Jesus Christ and His death and resurrection.

And it's now given to me as complete in Him. And you'll notice what he goes on to say in this context.

[15:22] He says, we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And that's a word in which we are likely to stumble, isn't it? But I'm sure here you understand that hope in the New Testament is not wishful thinking.

Hope is a quiet assurance of a reality we have not yet fully experienced.

So, you might think for example of a, I shouldn't say this when there are children present, but you may think of a boy a couple of weeks before Christmas who looks out the window when he hears a noise outside.

He sees his dad opening the back of the car and carrying in this thing covered in a couple of blankets that seems to have two round things, one on either side. And he sees his aunt a few days later and she says, well, what do you want for Christmas, Johnny?

And he says quietly, I'm hoping to get a new bicycle. He's not hoping against hope. He has this quiet assurance that that thing that came in under cover of darkness, brought in by his naive father, that's going to be his on Christmas Day.

[16:44] It's just that it's not yet his. But he is as sure of it as the bicycle is hiding in the garage.

That's the Christian's position. We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. And, you know, I think even in our present world, when non-Christians see that in a Christian, when non-Christians see that in a Christian, they can at least inwardly think, that is really wonderful.

And I think I can understand that. That if you had this profound assurance and joy looking forward to what would happen to you when you died, that you would be in the presence of the glorious God, I could see how wonderful that would be for you.

But they might say to us, it's what follows. I see that's wonderful. But what follows is mysterious to me.

Because Paul goes on to say in verse 3, not only is this so, but even beyond that, you notice that language, even beyond that, we exult in our sufferings.

[18 : 13] And it's clear, isn't it? Paul was not a masochist. Paul enjoyed having Dr. Luke beside him. He had enough medical knowledge to tell Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach's sake, and not the London water that he had been drinking.

He wasn't a masochist. He doesn't say that he enjoyed suffering. Nor does he say we rejoice when our suffering is lying in the past.

He says we rejoice in our suffering, not because of what we feel, but because of what we know. That's a lesson we're all familiar with.

That's a lesson that comes out to us again and again, I'm sure, in the preaching. But it's what we know drives what we feel as Christians, not the other way around.

So what do we know that makes us exult and rejoice in the gospel, even in the midst of our suffering? It's not because of the pain, it's because of the productivity in verse 3.

[19 : 20] Suffering produces endurance. Endurance produces character. Character produces hope. And hope doesn't put us to shame because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

What's his point? His point is actually that none of this is produced apart from pressure. That's his point. The Olympic Games is going to be next year.

They're going to be sometime in the future. I don't know what you watch. I watch the heavy lifters. And I sit there. If my wife's not there, I might get myself some popcorn.

I sit there watching them, coming onto the stage like this, lifting up these enormous weights, their knees buckling, their arms shaking, the stage quaking.

And lifting it up for the prescribed number of seconds and then letting the thing drop when the green light goes on. And I'm sitting there in the couch thinking, that'll be me next year.

[20 : 33] It doesn't work that way, does it? Strength like that doesn't come without exercise that stretches us to the limit.

And it is kind of strange that even as Christians we can think that it might work a different way in the Christian life. I remember my friend, Derek Thomas, telling me of a, I'm sure it was a Welsh minister, of a lady who went to her minister and said, you know, I'm really struggling with this whole question of patience and endurance.

Oh, he said, we can fix that. Let's pray. Lord, send some affliction into her life. In Jesus' name, Amen. And she's sitting staring at him saying, but I said my problem was I'm struggling with endurance.

It's a figment of our imagination that we strengthen endurance by never being in a situation that demands endurance.

My favourite, and this tells you something about the dark side of my personality, is I kind of secretly love it when I'm with a Christian who kind of gives the impression that they've got the Christian life figured out.

[21 : 52] Something happens and they lose it. They just momentarily lose it. And they get flustered. And the first thing they're likely to say to him is, I don't know what came over me. I'm usually a very patient person.

And I try to be patient enough not to say to them, the truth of the matter is, dear brother or dear sister, you're actually an impatient person whose patience has never grown because it's never been tested.

You don't grow, you don't grow, you don't grow, you don't grow in these graces without what tests them.

And that's why Paul says we can even rejoice in our sufferings, not because we enjoy the strain or the pain, but because we see through into its significance that through this God is stretching us.

He's disciplining us. He's putting us into the gymnasium. And he is building up this Christ-like character. I mean, we read that in Hebrews even of our blessed Lord Jesus, don't we?

[23 : 12] How did he learn obedience? Through the afflictions he suffered. And if it's God's way with his son, then it's God's way with all of his children.

rejoice in God himself.

And Paul has got to that conclusion through everything that he says between verse 5 and the beginning of verse 11 because what he's doing there is saying to these Roman Christians, you do understand the kind of God we have, don't you?

Christian, you do understand the kind of God you have, don't you? But the truth of the matter is that for many of us living the Christian life, we don't.

[29 : 08] We still have that lingering sense that every time we stumble, the fist is going to come down and smash us. I mean, I know it's endemic in non-Christians that if God is, God must be a God of love.

I don't believe that they believe that for a minute. They may say the God I believe in is a God of love. But once you begin to probe their lives, you see that instead of running towards and embracing this so-called God of love, they are running from him as fast as they possibly can. They don't believe it for a minute. So how do we know it's true? How do we know in the midst of the suffering that he's speaking about here and the affliction that he's speaking about here, how do I know that God really loves me?

And in the general evangelical subculture, maybe more in the United States than here, the most common answer is because things are going well in my life.

That's the proof God really loves me, that things are going well in my life. There's not a moment that the Apostle Paul would have believed that. It seems most of his life things were not going very well.

[30 : 33] So how do we know that the God in whom we trust really loves us? So that we can rejoice in this God himself. What is it that keeps me from rejoicing in God?

It's that I'm not persuaded he really loves me. What makes it difficult for a young man to rejoice in a young woman?

It's that he's not persuaded she really loves him. He has all kinds of doubts that need to be dissolved. Well, how do I dissolve this doubt?

Well, how do you measure love? You measure love by the identity of the lover who loves. You measure love by the difference between the lover and the loved.

You measure love by the distance the lover is willing to go for the loved one. You measure love by the sacrifices the lover is willing to make for the loved one.

[31 : 39] You measure love by the gifts that the lover is willing to give to the loved one. And it's all here, isn't it, in these verses. And the way in which the Apostle Paul emphasizes it is that when we were weak for the ungodly, he died.

And actually, when this letter was written, Paul was dictating this letter. You remember, Tertius actually wrote it down. And when Paul dictated it, he found a way of highlighting the essence of this. And it wouldn't make good English, but it makes great theology if we reconfigure the translation according to Paul's word order.

While we were still weak at the right time for the ungodly, Christ died. For one, for a righteous person, will scarcely die.

Though perhaps for a good person, one would dare even to die. But God demonstrates his love for us in that while we were still sinners, for us Christ died.

[32 : 58] So where am I going to look for this lasting persuasion? That I can rejoice in God himself because I know that this God loves me.

And he's saying there's only one place to look. You're not going to find it in the level of the fruits of your regeneration. You're not going to find it in the fruit of your sanctification or your service. There is only one place in all history, in all the cosmos, that will prove beyond doubt to you. That will dissolve all your anxieties.

And that's to be found in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. As C.H. Spurgeon said, somewhere down the line, I look at the cross and I find myself asking this question, does he love me more than he loves him?

Because that's what it looks like. God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him would have eternal life.

[34 : 13] And he does it all in love. He does it in his love for us, in concert with his son's love for us, and his son's love for his father, and the help of the Holy Spirit in that ministry.

It is impossible to exaggerate, to overemphasize, that God has demonstrated his love for you in the death of his son.

And Paul later on in chapter 8, verse 32, will use that logic again, won't he? When he says, He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how then will he not also graciously give us everything we need?

And so the exhortation that's embedded in this is, let your gaze on the cross of Jesus Christ dissolve all your reservations about the love of God.

And then he adds to that, and he says, you notice in verse 8, if now we are justified by his blood, then much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

[35 : 32] 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.

You think if he died for you, he's going to give up on you now? If he gave his son for you, that he's going to stop loving you now?

The more I read, interestingly, in the older writers, the more I see them having to say to their contemporaries in other situations, other centuries, what is true of us, that this most fundamental element of the Christian gospel is actually the most difficult element for us sinners to grasp.

We sing about it, we talk about it, we preach about it, but it permeates so lightly into us, and many of us continue to live with a latent fear that at the end of the day he may not love me.

And so long as I am unsure that he loves me, it's never going to be possible for me to say that I rejoice in God himself, by himself, for himself, for my blessing.

[37 : 04] If he did all this when I was an enemy, then Paul says, there is no question that he will give you everything you need now that you are family.

And so he ends this passage. We rejoice through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

I suppose those of us who have read Pilgrim's Progress all have our favorite picture. My favorite picture comes in the second half in the story of Christiana, the pilgrim's wife, and the pictures she's shown in Interpreter's House, just as her husband was shown pictures in Interpreter's House.

And she's shown this picture of a man who's standing with a muckrake in his hands and he's seeking in the mud to find treasure and there is one who stands before him who is holding out a crown of gold.

And the man with the muckrake never lifts up his eyes to see the treasure. And I suppose in some ways it is actually an illustration of somebody who's not a Christian that they're looking in the wrong place.

[38 : 36] But I think it's often been an illustration speaking personally of myself anyway and of many Christians I've known. But we need to lift our eyes up to the one who has died for us and holds out to us the crown of gold.

And you remember what Christiana cries out when she sees this picture. God, deliver me from this muckrake. God, deliver me from this muckrake.

That was in your hand. And we come and feast on a passage like this and ask God to impress it deeply in our hearts to know that he loves us.

He never began to love us. He's loved us from eternity. He's shown his love on the cross. And he's never going to stop loving us for all eternity because of what he's done for us in Jesus Christ.

He's proved it to us. So let's yield to the truth of the gospel and bask in the love of God together.

[40 : 04] Let's pray. Let's pray.