

Sermon 30: Romans 5:1-2: Peace, Grace and Hope

OUTLINE

Peace

Grace

Hope

INTRODUCTION

If you had lived in London during WWII, or if you were a prisoner of war, or a Jew kept in Auschwitz, the greatest news that would change your world would be the words, 'The war is over!' The trauma of living in the fear of death, the bombing, the fighting, the destruction, is all now come to an end. Now that we have been justified by faith, this is the first piece of news that Paul delivers to us as he seeks to meat out the implications of our justification by faith, 'we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.' You will remember that we have moved into a new section. Paul has moved from explaining how a person is justified to the benefits of a person who is justified. We have in front of us now in the first two verses, 3 outcomes of our justification. They will supply us with our three points for this message. We will be looking at peace with God, the grace in which we stand, and rejoicing in hope.

Peace

Our first point is concerned with the statement in verse 1, 'we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.' Now the first thing that we need to say about this statement is that we are talking about peace *with* God, not the peace *from* God. In other words we are not talking about the subjective experience of peace as it is described in Philippians 4:7, 'And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Rather, we are speaking about the relationship of peace that now exists between a holy God and the justified sinner. Paul is declaring to us that the war is over between God and yourself if you are justified in Christ.

There would be many today to whom this idea of a war between God and man is news. There are many, even in the church who do not realise that God and mankind are set against each other as enemies. They think that all is well and that we are constantly living in a time of peace. They live in a fairy tale where God is constantly looking down on mankind with a smile on his face, indulgent towards our sins and the thought of punishment never crossing his mind. God is our enemy while we are outside of Christ, and we are His. This might surprise some. Even Christians think that we are God's enemies but He is not ours, but this is not what Paul teaches. If you glance down at 5:10 you will see it says there, 'while we were enemies.' This is not means that we were against God, but that His wrath was against us. God is the enemy of sinners, not because He is bad tempered and is looking for someone to hate. No, because God is holy and we are sinners, God is turned towards us in wrath. We are under the judgement of God with the threat of eternal hell

hanging over us until we are justified by faith. It is right and perfect that God is the enemy of the sinner, if He did not care, and did not respond as His justice and holiness should He would deny Himself and cease to be God.

The war from our perspective however is totally different. Where God is right to be turned towards sinners in anger, we are wrong to be turned towards a holy, good, generous, gracious, merciful, patient God in hatred. And this is our default setting as we relate to God. We are by nature children of wrath (Eph. 2:1-3), who are at enmity with God's law (Rom. 8:7), who willingly suppress the truth of God's existence that is revealed in Creation replacing it with our own man made fancies, (Rom 1:18-32).

But how was this war ended? How is it possible that a God who is perfect in holiness and justice can ever change towards sinners without denying Himself for we do not have the power to change ourselves? The next few words in verse 1 give us the answer, 'through our Lord Jesus Christ.' It can only be by Christ that the enmity of our sins can be removed. What is interesting about this phrase is that in this section of chapters 5-8 this idea of through Jesus Christ is found at the end of every chapter, capping each chapter off reminding us that it is only in Christ that we have these many benefits, (5:21; 6:23; 7:25; 8:39) it is only repeated again in 15:30 showing how integral Christ is to the blessings of salvation. Jesus has brought about this peace by being our propitiation, by taking the punishment that our sins deserve. This way God does not have to pretend that we have not sinned, and lie, but He pays for them in full. This is what Paul will elaborate on later in 5:8, 'but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.' Jesus is the only reason there can be peace.

This idea of Jesus being our peace has been powerfully brought out in the mission biography written by Don Richardson called 'Peace Child.'¹ Don Richardson and his wife went to New Guinea to minister amongst a cannibalistic headhunting group of tribes. When they arrived the various warring tribes wanted to live near the new missionaries because of the newly available axes, matches, tin cups and other modern items which were like gold in their primitive lifestyles. Don had a very hard time of trying to preach the Gospel to them. They prized deceit and treachery as heroic. They bestowed the most honour on those who could deceive someone with friendship for a prolonged period of time winning over their trust, and then in the end murdering, eating and beheading them. So when he preached the Gospel story Judas was seen as the hero because he betrayed Jesus with friendship and a kiss and Jesus was the sorry victim not the victor. Don scratched his head as to how he could break through this hardness of heart and get the message that Jesus is who they needed as saviour. Opportunity came when the tribes who were constantly at war with each other could not live at peace with each other. This brought things to a head. How do two tribes who value deceit make a true peace that is not merely a masked peace with betrayal waiting in the background? They had a custom of giving a 'peace child.' A child from each tribe would be given to the other tribe. A father from each tribe would give up a son to the other tribe. The Father who gives up a son would choose a man to give the son

1 Don Richardson, *Peace Child*, (California, USA, Regal Books, Gospel Light: 2005).

to. This new man would then be given the name of the father who gave away the son and would be the advocate who would plead for peace with the tribe who gave the son. As long as the peace child lived, peace would reign between two warring tribes, the killing of a peace child was the greatest crime that could be committed. Don Richardson used this tribal custom as a way of teaching them the Gospel. That God gave His beloved Son as a peace child, but He gave His Son without us giving one in return. He gave His Son knowing that we would kill Him. But He is risen from the dead and can never die again, so then unlike a human peace child which could die and end the peace, Christ is resurrected and seated at the right hand of the Father in eternal intercession for us. It is only because Christ has been given in payment for our sin as a propitiation that He is our eternal peace child!

We now have an unconquerable peace. We are now secure in the eternal love of God and nothing can undo what He has done. When the devil comes with His accusations telling us that we are still God's enemies we point to Christ as our peace child and propitiation. When our consciences tell us that we have sinned and cannot be forgiven we look at Christ as the sufficient sacrifice for all of our sins. When we feel the fear of judgement come upon us as we think about judgement day we remember that we have already been justified because of what Jesus has done. We have already been judged, there is no more judgement for us we are at peace with God.

Grace

But that is not all, 'Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand.' We move then to the second blessing listed in this verse that we have access by faith through Christ into this grace in which we stand. You could think of this blessing in this way: a country that was once at war with another country has now been reunited with it, all sanctions have been lifted and all the benefits of being united to the richer more powerful country are ours. Or another way to think of it would be, imagine an orphan being adopted by a millionaire and being given freedom to live in his mansions, roam his grounds, drive his cars, come into his personal presence, be served by his servants, etc. The central idea in this blessing is that we are now in the domain of grace. Every person in the world lives in one of two domains, one of two covenants. Either we are in Adam and therefore under law, or we are in Christ and under grace.

Being under law means being under the judgement of the law. Since we are sinners in Adam we are under the death penalty. If we try to clean up our act and stop sinning, we will still have to pay for all of our past sins. The only way to get out from under the judgement of the law is to defect to a new King—Jesus. When we become Christians we swear an oath of allegiance to Him trusting that His life and death are sufficient to obtain a divine amnesty against our sins bringing us out from under the law into grace. Christ settles any outstanding charges against us and brings us into His kingdom as a royal priesthood.

We enter this kingdom by grace. God was under no obligation to save you but He did. He did not owe you Christ as your saviour but He sent Him. God did not have to draw you to

faith in Christ by the working of the Spirit, we enter the state of justification by grace through faith. Paul is telling us here that the grace does not end with entrance by grace, but we continue to stand in a realm where all of God's dealings towards us are by grace.

Growth is by grace: God does not merely save us from the guilt of sin and then leave us to try and overcome the power of sin by ourselves. No in His grace He grants us His Spirit who causes us to grow not according to the measure we put in but by a gracious measure where we obtain growth in grace that exceeds the effort we are making in cooperating with the Spirit.

Prayer is by grace: Paul uses a word that he also uses in relation to prayer 'access' (Eph 3:12). We approach the Father through the Son, we are made beautiful and accepted by God because of Jesus righteousness that qualifies us. Like Esther we are granted access to the presence of the King and not killed because we are beautiful to Him by being dressed in the righteousness of Christ. Jesus has also given us His name, like a millionaire signing a blank cheque telling us to pray to God with confidence, John 14:14, 'If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.' Have you ever recoiled from prayer saying, 'I am not worthy to ask for this thing?' If you have then you have forgotten that prayer is by grace, you are never worthy to pray out of your own righteousness even on your very best day. We are only ever qualified to enter God's presence by Christ's righteousness, and this is the righteousness that every Christian is dressed in. 'Access' is also a significant word redemptive historically. Adam was kicked out of the garden and no longer had access to God. There was a cherubim with a fiery sword to kill anyone who tried to enter. Well Christ has quenched that fiery sword with His own blood and we now have access to the tree of eternal life and fellowship with God.

Service is in grace: We now serve God as children not as slaves. We serve in the freedom of knowing that our performance does not determine our eternal destiny. We know that we are justified by Christ's righteousness and now all of our service to God is not done from a motive of terror or self-preservation but a joyful gratitude. And when we fail and sin, grace has supplied for those sins in the death of Christ.

Endurance is by grace: but salvation that could be lost would not be salvation by grace, and so Paul uses a word that hints at the security of our present position in grace, 'stand.' This is a word that indicates that we are secure and fast. We are standing in grace, His strength keeping us. This is why Paul ends this section with such expectation in Romans 8:38-39, 'For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

Rewards by grace: And then one day when we get to heaven and enter our inheritance, we will be enjoying riches that Christ worked for.

This is vital for us to understand because when we go through trials or sickness or tragedy, God is not punishing and dealing with us on the basis of law but of grace. So that even

when we have sinned and God's fatherly discipline is working in our lives God is still dealing with us according to grace not law, not as our sins deserve but according to the riches of His mercy towards us in Christ.

Hope

We come then to our third blessing in these verses, 'and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.' Firstly, we need to pay attention to that word 'rejoice'. Rejoice is of course a word that means to derive great joy from something, in this instance it is from the hope of the glory of God. We will discuss shortly what this means but first we need to sound out the depths of this word 'rejoice.' It is not necessarily the best translation, it should probably be the word 'boast/exult.' In other words a word that is stronger than rejoice. Paul is not merely telling us that we are happy, he is wanting to indicate that the nature of our joy is as a result of justification of a certain nature. We do not merely rejoice in hope of seeing the glory of God we in fact boast in it. This word is used in regard to suffering and God in v3, 11. This is in fact one of Paul's favourite words which he uses often, and its use here is particularly striking. 1 Corinthians 1:28-31, 'God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. 30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31 so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." Boasting for Paul usually something that he tells us we cannot do unless we are doing it in God. And yet in Romans 5:2 he tells us that we boast in hope of the glory of God.

When we talk about hoping for something in our day and age we usually mean something rather weak. We hope it might rain, or we hope to take a family holiday this year. These hopes do not necessarily materialise and come to pass. Paul is talking with great certainty. We are able to boast in our hope, shout it from the roof tops, cling to it for assurance and remind our wounded consciences of it because God has done it not us. We are so well justified, our sins are so well taken care of in the life and death of Christ that our eternal destiny is certain. The certainty of it breeds in us then a very real and substantial joy. In fact it is something so sure that when the devil comes to tempt us and accuse us and try to shake our confidence in our salvation we do not cower and back into our shells we boast in what God has done, and we march on unhindered by worry over our salvation.

What is it that we are looking forward to that causes us to rise up in such ecstasy? The certain future of the glory of God is what lies before us. The glory of God probably has two specific meanings to Paul's mind. In the first place Paul teaches us that one day when Jesus comes again we will all be changed in the twinkling of an eye. We will be made to be like our Living Head Jesus Christ receiving in the place of this body of death a body in the likeness of Christ's own resurrection body. A body that can never die and free from all the effects of sin. A body that will be a fit instrument, and an obedient servant in the service of God for eternity. Christ as the second Adam has received as a reward in His resurrection a new humanity that we all come to share in when we are justified, but only fully when we are

glorified. Paul often goes straight from justification to glorification, Romans 8:30, 'And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.' These two things are so closely tied in Paul's mind as to be inseparable. You cannot be justified without glorification being your certain possession. We will one day be dressed in the medals of Christ's own perfect obedience and character reflecting a greater glory than Moses in the restored and perfected image of God that is our portion through Him. We will get to be reflections of His glory, His righteousness, the perfection of His human nature will be the mould for ours, and this will be our glorious dress. So in one sense we will be wearing the glory of God.

However, the greater sense that we need to take a hold of is the sense that we will one day be in the direct presence of God and witnesses to His glory. Unlike Moses that had to be hidden in the cleft of a rock because seeing God would vaporize him, we will have perfect bodies that are made able to stand in the direct presence of God. Paul is talking not about the intermediate state but that final day when all things will be made new and God Himself will wipe tears from our eyes. Revelation 21:1-4, 'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." On that day there will be nothing but God's glory, no sin, no enemy, no death.

So what is ours if we are justified by faith, Peace with God, the grace in which we stand, and we boast in the hope of the glory of God.