

Romans 5:1-11

Results of Justification

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Sermon: You Wouldn't Dare! Would You? Romans 5:1-11

George Carlin once famously remarked “If you have a boxer, the undisputed heavyweight champion of the world . . .then what’s all the fighting about?”

Think with me for a moment about overcoming adversity . . .

--Tough times never last, but tough people do.

--A successful man is one who can build a firm foundation with the bricks that others throw at him. David Brinkley

--Good timber does not grow with ease; the stronger the wind, the stronger the trees. J. Marriott

--Be thankful if your job is a little harder than you like. A razor can't be sharpened on a piece of velvet.

--A smooth sea never made a skilled mariner.

--If you find a path with no obstacles, it probably doesn't lead anywhere. Frank A. Clark

--no one can make you feel inferior without your consent

--When it is dark enough, you can see the stars. Ralph Waldo Emerson

Adversity, challenges, trials and tribulations—these things are part of life. How we engage them, How we react and respond to them, how we get through . . .this says a lot about who we are and who we believe Christ to be in us. Paul writes to the Romans to “boast, be proud of your sufferings, Knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character

produces a hope that does not disappoint because God's love has been poured into our hearts. And the first thing that we control when it comes to how we face adversity and trials and tribulation is our attitude.

Attitude

by: Rev. Charles Swindoll,

The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think, say, or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness, or skill. It will make or break a company, a church, a home. The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day.

We cannot change our past. We cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude. I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it. And so it is with you. We are in charge of our attitudes.

Swindoll's words resonate with me. They are a reminder that life is not always easy, not always sweet, not always sunny. But if we are able to look beyond present circumstances and see our future goals

realized, we are more likely to allow our gratification to be delayed. But here's the thing, the faithful Christian life is more than just the power of positive thinking. It is also realizing that we, even in our complete unworthiness, became the receivers of God's justifying love. In our sinfulness, we became the object of God's redemption, even at the cost of the cross.

A former supervisor of mine at the camp where Kelley and I met, Bob Giesy, repeatedly said "One of the greatest thing about our camp is that we never have any problems. Not a one. What we have, is opportunities. Now I'll grant you that *sometimes* it feels like we have so many opportunities at once that we can't take advantage of them all, but what we have aren't problems, they're opportunities.

As Christians, we are challenged by our daily lives to let the grace of God be reflected in all that we do, even in our imperfections, that we might also echo the words of John the Baptist "Jesus must increase, but I must decrease". Even in the moments when it feels like we are being attacked, maybe even especially in those moments, it is an opportunity to follow the example of Jesus, to love God, to pray for those who persecute you and to love your neighbor as yourself.

If our attitude is one of assurance of our victory in Christ, it makes a difference in how we respond to circumstances in life

The first verse of our passage today says we have obtained access to the grace in which we stand. How many of you with a computer are familiar with a computer have seen the words “Access Denied”? How many of you, when logging into an online service of some kind, have mastered the password retrieval services much before you’ve actually become proficient at using the program in the manner for which it’s been designed? How many of you have had the sinking feeling of reaching in your pocket or purse on your way to the car for your keys, only to realize that you can see them on the front seat or console, on the other side of each carefully locked door and window. Access Denied, indeed. Passed over for an award, a promotion, someone better-looking, a spot on the squad or a place on the team? Access Denied. My 5 year old nephew Luke (you’ll meet him in a couple of weeks if you haven’t yet), well, he’s not the tallest for his age. So when he wants to ride ALL of the rides in an amusement park with his big brother Jake . . . Access Denied.

With Jesus Christ, our to grace access is not denied, but granted. Not earned by what we do; not even gained by our self-righteous claims of humility. --“I’m pretty sure I’m a little more humble than *that* guy!”-- Nope, It’s all God’s initiative.

Shirley Guthrie writes:

Christians know that sinful human beings are alienated from God. It is our fault. We have disobeyed God’s commandments. Even worse, we have ignored or rejected God’s love. But strangely enough, it is

not the guilty but the *injured* party who acts to restore the broken relationship. God does not demand that we first do something to make up for what we have done or not done before God reluctantly agrees to forgive and love us again. God makes the first move. Exactly the opposite of the procedure in pagan religions, it is not God who is reconciled to us, but we who are reconciled to God. It is not we who make peace with God but God who makes peace with us. That is what the death of Jesus is all about.

And this is the meaning of Lent—and this is the story of God’s unfolding Hope.

When a kind word of yours brightens a day and lightens the load of an acquaintance . . .Access granted. When Your sense of the grace offered to you gives you the strength to offer forgiveness to someone else . . .Access granted. When a friend just needs to be heard, and your ears are available without judgment or quick condemnation or instant fixes . . .Access granted. The Kingdom of God is not the end result of a series of buttons we push in the right order, God is not manipulated. But in Christ’s grace, we can find ourselves in the place where God’s will IS, on earth as it is in heaven.

We do a disservice to our faith when we buy into the slippery theology of a prosperity gospel that says “Good things are happening to me, it must be because I’m doing good.” Rather, Paul reminds us today that we have gained access through Jesus

Christ—and nothing of our own doing. If we need a mantra of theology of which we must constantly remind ourselves—let it be this: God has blessed me in order that I might be a blessing. Or, God has called me for a purpose, and that purpose is to be a help where there is hurt.

Your Hut's on Fire

The only survivor of a shipwreck was washed up on a small, uninhabited island. He prayed feverishly for God to rescue him. Every day he scanned the horizon for help, but none seemed forthcoming. Exhausted, he eventually managed to build a little hut out of driftwood to protect himself from the elements, and to store his few possessions.

One day, after scavenging for food, he arrived home to find his little hut in flames, with smoke rolling up to the sky. He felt the worst had happened, and everything was lost. He was stunned with disbelief, grief, and anger. He cried out, "God! How could you do this to me?"

Early the next day, he was awakened by the sound of a ship approaching the island! It had come to rescue him! "How did you know I was here?" asked the weary man of his rescuers. "We saw your smoke signal," they replied.

The Moral of This Story:

It's easy to get discouraged when things are going badly, but we shouldn't lose heart, because God is at work in our lives, even in the midst of our pain and suffering.

Remember that the next time your little hut seems to be burning to the ground.

It just may be a smoke signal that summons the Grace of God.

It is easier said than done “Be proud of your sufferings”. All of us at times have had the kind of sufferings are not merely healed and softened with a “buck up, kiddo, keep your chin up” approach. But even in the hard times, the times when the hurt is deep and the tears are plentiful. We rejoice that Christ has walked among us and knows what sorrow, what doubt, and what sadness feel like. He knows the sting of betrayal.

The Focus of this sermon is, and has been, the free unmerited gift of God’s grace to the world. But what is its function? What would God’s word have us to do in light of the gospel? I am reminded of section III of the Heidelberg Catechism.

Question 86: Since we are redeemed from our sin and its wretched consequences by grace through Christ without any merit of our own, why must we do good works?

Answer: Because just as Christ has redeemed us with his blood he also renews us through the Holy Spirit according to his own image, so that with our whole life we may show ourselves grateful to God

for his goodness and that he may be glorified through us; and further, so that we ourselves may be assured of our faith by its fruits and by our reverent behavior may win our neighbors to Christ.

If we are to bear the name Christians, should we not also practice the same love for our family as does Christ for all his family? Do we dare live out that kind of love, no matter the cost? Do we pursue justice and righteousness; love God with all we have and are? Do we dare? If we follow the example of Christ, then we surely will bear this cross. This is as Paul said, and as Christ showed and proved, that God is and will be faithful to us.

Romans 6:1ff

“Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism unto death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, So we too might walk in Newness of life.”

This is the story of our unfolding hope.