

“THE CROSS AND CHRISTIAN HOPE”

The theme of this morning's Scripture and the sermon is the cross and Christian hope. It's been said that *“what oxygen is to the lungs, hope is to life”*. What we see here in **Romans 5** is that the cross of Christ and our hope in life are connected. The heart of the passage is this truth: ***the more fully you receive the grace of the cross, the more thoroughly you find the power of hope.*** Look at **verses 1-2**. It says, *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.*

I. BECAUSE OF THE CROSS, WE HAVE A HOPE THAT DOESN'T DEPEND ON US.

Verse 1 says *we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*. That's a powerfully and purposefully confident statement. It is crucial to notice that it applies to a particular category of people: those who have been justified through faith. If, you have turned to Christ as your Savior and Lord and put your trust in him, then you have peace with God. If you've put your faith in Christ, then God *has* told you and is *telling* you that he counts you as righteous and will treat you as righteous not because of your efforts or performance but for Christ's sake.

Verse 2 says, *Through him, we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.* **Verse 2** is saying that God's grace is not just a bailout plan given to you once, as if you now have to watch out because it is not going to be offered the next time you mess up. This grace becomes an enfolding reality in which we stand. It's an atmosphere of grace, a state of grace that doesn't depend on us but on Christ.

Illustration: This word, translated “access,” was used in the time of kings to describe the process of being brought into the presence of the

King and given access to Him. The picture is that when you put your faith in Christ he puts his arm around you and brings you into the presence of God the Father. When we are brought into the presence of God, through Christ and with Christ what we find is grace; no condemnation, but the undeserved, undiminished kindness of God that gives us boldness and confidence in prayer. As **Hebrews 4:16** says we can come *boldly* to the throne of grace in times of need.

Application: Sometimes people ask, "How, can I picture a Holy God smiling in love as He looks on me and listens to stumbling prayers that rise from a heart riddled with many sins, mixed motives and confused commitments?" Well, when you feel like that remember this! God's grace, is not a one-time gift that God pours out on us when He makes peace with us. **Verse 2** says: "*through Christ we have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.*"

So if there are sins to confess to God confess them. But don't think you have to confess them like one who has been thrown out and is beating on the door trying to get access again. Confess them as a child who is standing fully accepted in the presence of a loving Father concerned about your growth and a closer relationship. If you have received Christ as your own Lord and Savior, stand firm in your faith, knowing the truth of **Romans 5:2**, that through the cross of Christ, not your goodness but His grace and sacrifice, you have peace with God and you stand in grace and you can *rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.*"

Glory! Glory is also translated as *splendor, honor, and radiance*. It suggests ideas like *wonder, wealth, weight, and dignity*. When Scripture speaks of the hope of the glory of God, it's talking about a manifestation of the splendor and goodness of God that we are not only going to witness but that we're going to be brought up into, participate in, and by which we're going to be transformed and fulfilled. **Colossians 3:4** *When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

*Because of the cross of Christ, we have a hope that doesn't depend on us. Now, look at **verses 3-4**; not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and*

endurance produces character, and character produces hope,

II. BECAUSE OF THE CROSS

WE HAVE A HOPE THAT ISN'T DESTROYED BY SUFFERING.

Verse 3 assumes we will experience suffering. Believing in Jesus promises eternal salvation. It does not exempt you from suffering in a broken world. We have to be realistically reconciled to the difficulty and brevity of life and also to the glory and eternity of our hope.

A. Our hope helps us to be *prepared for* and *patient in* suffering.

Illustration: I remember in a football game in the 80s, one of the announcers observed the outstanding running back, Walter Payton, had accumulated over nine miles of yardage running the ball in his career. The other announcer said, "That's right, and that's with someone knocking him down an average of every 4.6 yards!" One thing that helps you keep on is never expecting it to be easy then it is, not being under any illusions, and determining that when you do get knocked down, you will get back up and run again just as hard. Once we clearly see that it is assumed that Christians *will* experience all kinds of suffering, then we are better prepared to face it.

The theme of hope in suffering is revisited in **Romans 8:22-23**. It says *For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. We sang about this earlier in the song *Creation Awaits!* Creation awaits the glorious day when Jesus returns, and trials will fade!*

Romans 8:24-25 *For in this hope we were saved. Now, hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.* In the Bible, hope is not uncertainty. It means you know it is coming, it just isn't here yet. That's critical. During his life on earth, Jesus raised people from the dead. He did not raise all people from the dead. He healed some people of their sickness. He didn't heal everybody that was sick. Why? Because He came to save us by dying on the cross for our sins, and to

give us a preview of the greater glory to come. What He did on earth is just a foretaste of what he will do when our salvation is gloriously consummated. That day has not yet come. So when people are sick, we pray in faith trusting God the Father. Healing *often* comes. Sometimes providentially and medically. Sometimes mysteriously and supernaturally. Sometimes the powers of the age to come break in and are manifest in this present age, but *knowing* what is coming helps us wait patiently now for the fulfillment of our hope of greater glory.

B. This passage calls us not only to be *prepared for and patient in our sufferings* but to rejoice in them.

What does that mean? Rejoicing in suffering is not simply a grit your teeth and be strong attitude. It is not just toughing it out by willpower. It doesn't mean pretending that we are happy when we aren't. Rejoicing in your sufferings means choosing to believe God's promises and finding purpose and sustaining hope in your struggles.

There's something we need to know! **Verse 3** says, "*We also rejoice in our sufferings, knowing...*" He says we know something. That's why we rejoice. It is not just an unexplainable emotional response. It is the rational response of faith to something we know and believe. What is it that we know? **Verse 3**; We know "*suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.*

Illustration: A burn is a burn, but you feel very differently about a burn that you foolishly suffer because of carelessness with the iron, and a similar burn suffered because you rushed into a burning building and saved a child. Think about the labor and delivery of a child. It is hard, but there is a purpose and an outcome with so much joy in it. It produces something wonderful! As a Christian you can rejoice in suffering because you know that, for you, suffering produces something worthwhile. Three things are mentioned:

1st Endurance. This word means to remain steady under pressure. Whenever you go through a difficult time and you keep on following Christ, trusting God and loving others, and you wait on and rely on God to work the problem out, that develops your endurance.

2nd Character. This word is used for someone or something that has been tested and proven or refined.

3rd Hope. To be a person of proven character is to be a person purified by suffering from false hopes so that hope in God becomes the source of your strength and the cause of your joy.

Illustration: Sometimes the Bible uses the imagery of a furnace that purifies gold. You take raw gold ore full of impurities but you put it in the furnace and the impurities are burned off but the pure gold remains. In all of our hearts there are many impurities. Our impurities are not just sins but false hopes.

In a book titled *Deeper*, by Dane Ortlund, I found this quote.

If you want to be a solid, weighty, radiant old man or woman someday, let the pain of your life force you to believe your own theology. Let it propel you into deeper fellowship with Christ than ever before. Don't let your heart dry up. He is in your pain. He is refining you. All that you will lose ... is the dross of self and misery that, in your deepest heart, you want to shed anyway. 1

When you go into the furnace, there is only one hope that can survive the heat no matter what. When he says *suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character, and character hope*, the hope he is talking about hope in God and in the gracious promises of God.

It is the cross of Christ that makes this hope possible in life. Because of the cross we have a hope that doesn't depend on us and isn't destroyed by suffering. But the place where we see the importance of the cross most clearly is in the last point here.

III. BECAUSE OF THE CROSS WE HAVE A HOPE THAT WILL NOT DISAPPOINT IN THE END.

Verses 5-8 and hope does not put us to shame, (this means it will not disappoint us) because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. ⁶ For while we were

still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die - ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Look at how this passage describes us when Christ died for us.

1. We were weak (powerless), verse 6,

2. We were ungodly, verse 6

3. We were not righteous. That's the implication of **verse 7.**

4. We were not good. That's also the implication of **verse 7.**

The idea of righteous is morally and ethically correct, the idea of good adds to that the idea of caring and warm and personable. Paul is saying few people would die for a man who was coldly correct in his behavior. But some might die for a person who was not only correct in his actions but warmly loving and genuinely caring. Now the point is we were *neither* in Christ's eyes and yet Christ love and care for us was such that died for us anyway.

5. We were sinners. Verse 8. *but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Look at how this comes to a conclusion in **verses 9-11**: *Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.* Twice, we get the phrase: “*much more?*” If when we were powerless, ungodly, unrighteous, not good, and sinful, God has done what he has done, how much more certain is it he will do all he said.

God's wrath is his holy, righteous, hatred of and adverse response to sin. We deserve it but we've been saved from it. **Verse 9** God reconciled us to himself! If *when we were enemies* he reconciled us through the death of his Son - now that we *are beautifully and fully reconciled* through the ultimate gift of grace in the cross of Christ, how confident and therefore deeply thankful can we be that we are saved from his wrath and promised his glory instead!

CONCLUSION

Revelation 21:4 says *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.*"

Think of that, and all it implies! No more shattered hopes, bitter disappointments, painful losses, sleepless nights, broken hearts, shameful regrets, hurtful relationships, injured bodies, troubled minds ... All of that will be part of the former things that have passed away. It seems the new creation is more easily pictured in terms of what will *not be there* because to fully understand what it will be like is largely inconceivable in our present state. We are asked to imagine it and to believe in it not because it is imaginary but because it is beyond present experience.

The word used to describe it is "*glory*." One of the most outstanding living scholars of the New Testament scriptures is Doctor Thomas Schreiner who has written a magisterial commentary on the book of Romans. When he speaks of the glory in the book of Romans, he uses adjectives like *stunning, magnificent, incomparably delightful, indescribably beautiful... so much so that the whole creation is longing for it.* ² That's your hope in Christ, and it doesn't depend on you or how you are doing or what you have done but on Christ and what he did for you, in love, on his cross.

Amen.

¹ Ortlund, Dane: Deeper, p. 133

² Schreiner, Thomas: Romans, Baker's Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. These phrases are found throughout his commentary on Romans 8:5-11