

# Tenacious Joy | Easter Sunday 2024

## Week 5 of Series Romans 3-8

### Romans 5:1-11

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Good morning! Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed! Happy Easter.

My name is Ethan. I'm one of the pastors here. If we haven't met or if it's been a while since we've seen each other, I'd love to shake your hand and talk with you after the service today. Whether you're here every week or this is your first time, I'm glad you're here.

## I. Introduction

Sometimes for churches when you get to Easter Sunday you press pause on whatever teaching series you're in so that you can clear space to focus on the resurrection of Jesus, but today we're actually just moving right along in a series that we've been in for the past few weeks on the Book of Romans. You heard Romans 5:1-11 read just a moment ago. If you have a Bible I'd love for you to turn there and get your eyes on that text. If you don't have a bible, we have them available over here to my right, your left.

While you're turning there, I want to pull on a thread of Christian history. Not a particular character or event, but a characteristic that can be traced through the centuries of the church. It's the thread of persistent, stubborn, tenacious joy in the face of suffering, hardship, and death. Now, if you're zoomed in on the comfortable, anemic, distracted American cultural Christianity in 2024 maybe tenacious joy isn't a characteristic that you'd associate with Christianity, but - let me tell you - when you zoom out and take in the breadth of history, Christians are a perplexingly joyful people in the face of circumstances that don't line up with their rejoicing.

You see it in someone like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor who reaches the shores of America where he's supposed to wait out WWII - and is immediately convicted and turns around in order to be in Germany to be ready to shepherd and rebuild the church after the war. And so he goes back to Germany, is eventually arrested, cheerfully serves and ministers to his fellow prisoners and guards in the German prison, and then is executed weeks before the end of the war. On his way to his execution he preaches a sermon and says, "this is for me the end, the beginning of life."<sup>1</sup> You see it in Christians who, when everybody was fleeing the cities because of the bubonic plague, ran toward the cities to care for the sick who couldn't care for themselves. You see it in the Apostle Paul, who simply refused to be dominated or discouraged in the face of suffering. Arrest him, he'll sing worship songs in jail and convert the jailer and his family. Put him in chains, slander his name, falsely accuse him, put him through shipwreck, poverty, hunger and he'll say, "I've learned to be content in all circumstances" (Phil 4:12). Beat him and threaten him with death and he'll say - "to live is Christ, to die is gain" (Phil 1:21).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.crossway.org/articles/this-day-in-history-the-execution-of-dietrich-bonhoeffer/>

In the time of the early church a follower of Jesus wrote a case for Christianity for a non-Christian named Diognetus and the resilient joy of Christian is part of their argument for the faith. He wrote:

Christians love all men, but all men persecute them. Condemned because they are not understood, they are put to death, but raised to life again. They live in poverty, but enrich many; they are totally destitute, but possess an abundance of everything. They suffer dishonor, but that is their glory. They are defamed, but vindicated. A blessing is their answer to abuse, deference their response to insult. For the good they do, they receive the punishment of malefactors, but even then they rejoice, as though receiving the gift of life.<sup>2</sup>

It's an unavoidable reality of the history of Christianity that the gospel produces people who can endure deep suffering with tenacious, courageous joy.

Now, I don't know about you but it seems to me like that kind of joyful resilience should be attractive to people, right? There was a myth that most of us in the West used to believe that the next generation would inherit a better world than the generation before, but that kind of optimism is quickly wearing thin in a world full of wars and rumors of wars, and so much more... So in a world that's falling apart, where some form of hardship seems almost certain, don't you want to know how to have persistent, stubborn, tenacious joy?

Today I want to consider the resilient joy of Christianity by unearthing the foundations of that kind of joy. And as we dig into Romans 5, it's going to allow us to excavate beneath the surface to see the hope, objectivity, and certainty that is underneath Christian joy. My aim is that if you were to leave here today convinced of one thing, it would be this: **To be a Christian means to have access to present joy rooted in future hope; bought by Jesus' death in the past and kept forever by Jesus' life.**

So that's where we're going. Before we dive in, I need to pray once more. *Father, the goal whenever we gather is for your people to lift their gaze up from the fog of war that is our everyday life and to arrest our attention on the transcendent beauty and immanent glory of Christ. People can't do that in a sermon or with a song. Only your Holy Spirit can lift our heads and transform our hearts. We depend on you, Lord. Would you help us? Amen.*

## II. Present Joy (v 1-5)

Alright. To be a Christian means to have access to present joy. Let's look at Romans 5.

Up to this point in this book, the Apostle Paul has been laying a foundation of gospel theology, and the foundation is this: you are justified by faith. Humanity has rebelled against God; the creatures worship created things instead of their Creator; no one is right with God; everyone in their sin chooses God's wrath and justly deserves God's wrath. We need to be right with God, but you don't get right with God by cleaning yourself up. There's no good behavior you can do that will outweigh the weight of your sin against him. So you can't be justified - you can't be made right with God - by your work. The only way to be made right with God is through trusting in the work of Christ on your behalf.

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<sup>2</sup> Epistle to Diognetus, ch. 5

That's faith. You are justified by faith. Paul has basically spent the first four chapters setting this foundation. And here at the beginning of Romans 5 he's going to build on that foundation.

Look with me starting in verse 1: "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith..." – If you are justified by faith. In other words, if you are a Christian, here's what you get. Four things – "we have..."

1. peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>2</sup> Through him we have also obtained...
2. ...access by faith into this grace in which we stand...
3. ...and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.
4. <sup>3</sup> Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings...

Now Paul gives this list of four results of being a Christian and then in the rest of our passage he kind of unpacks them in reverse order and that's what we're going to do. So look one more time with me at the beginning of verse 3: <sup>3</sup> Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings...

I don't know if we can really appreciate how audacious of a claim that is. First of all, he says "we *rejoice* in our sufferings." Maybe it's just because I trend cynical but to me, "rejoice" has kind of a syrupy, Ned Flanders ring to it. But that's my bias because that's not in the text! The Greek word that gets translated as "rejoice" can also mean *to boast in* or *to glory in*. This is not an out of touch, churchy platitude. This is like, when suffering comes you stand up with the boasting of a Pro Wrestler and you say, "Come on! Is that all you got?! Give me more! Are you not entertained?!" Paul gloried in his suffering and he assumed that other Christians did too. When I suffer, I'm prone to pity myself and wallow in my sufferings. And - here me - there is room in Christianity for grief and for lament. But Paul does not assume a tone of commiseration here. He assumes that Christians glory in their sufferings. And it's because, Paul says, for the Christian suffering doesn't terminate on itself. Suffering is transformed. Suffering is doing something.

We rejoice in our sufferings knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup> and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup> and hope 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.

For the Christian our sorrows and trials perform a ministry to us. They develop in us the characteristics of Christ. Suffering drives us to hope.

Listen, if we took ourselves outside of the framework of Christianity, we could see suffering as an unfortunate obstacle to our happiness, as a cruel punishment, as meaningless pain, as an impurity to be transcended, or as a test to prove your worthiness. But if that's how you view your suffering, either your suffering is totally meaningless or is totally dependent on your ability to make it through. It is exhausting and it is defeating. But Christianity says, because of Jesus your hardships are not a test of your faithfulness. Christ has been faithful for you. They're not a punishment for your sin, Christ has borne the punishment! They're not an obstacle to your happiness, your eternal joy has been guaranteed! They're not an impurity to be stoically transcended. They're real and they're acknowledged, but they are also momentary in light of eternity. And they are not meaningless. They're forging something in us.

Now, friends, the Christian life is a process of our minds and hearts being formed to think and love and live as Christ-like people. And that means that we're all in process, which means we can carry some of those non-Christian sensibilities into our suffering. And Jesus is patient. He will complete the work he's begun in you. But Paul is reminding us of the bold, tenacious, stubborn, courageous joy that we have access to as Christians when the bank account is empty, when the job is lost, when the friend betrays, when the marriage is hard, when your loved one turns their back on Christ, when cancer steals your life, when depression drains your strength, when trauma bites like a vicious dog that won't let go. Christian, you have access to a present joy. Now. In the midst of the process. In the middle of your hardship. You can turn the ship around and go back to Germany, you can run toward the plague, you can endure slander and poverty and persecution and death itself. Why? Because you have a present joy, rooted in a future hope.

### III. Future Hope (v 2 & 5)

Without Christ, you can be joyful in your sufferings. I'm sure it's possible. But If you don't have Christ, even if you muster up joy in the present, all you've got are your present joys. And that's not what Paul is talking about. Look at verse 2: "Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Now look at verse 4&5: "...endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup> and hope 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." The only reason we can have present joy in suffering is because it is rooted in future hope.

If you're new to the Bible or to Christianity, I'm so excited to tell you the Bible is like one massive, epic story. And when you hear about Jesus Christ and his Cross and his resurrection, you are hearing about the decisive battle that was won against evil. And that's the most important part. But you also need to know that, like every good story, there is a happily ever after coming. Right now we are on the battlefield and the Hero of the story has just slain the dragon and the dragon is on the ground, bleeding out and twisting and writhing and even though the battle has been won decisively, the battle will take a while to peter out and the slings and arrows of the enemy are still flying. We are in that moment, but because the dragon has been slain we can know in the muck and mire of the battle that peace and joy is certain. It will come. *That* is the hope of the glory of God!

The book of Revelation gives Christians a picture of our future hope:

"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. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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."

<sup>5</sup> And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."

Honestly the idea of eternity is terrifying to me. It's too big. My mind just panics. But do you know what is wonderful? When I am frustrated that I don't have the time or the resources to cultivate the kind of beauty that I want to cultivate around my house and in my yard, do you know what I think about? In the new earth, I'm gonna be a gardener and a builder. And it's going to be beautiful. And

when I am sad that I can't be with the member of my family who passed away too early, I can remember that they trusted Christ and I will be with them again in a remade earth with no death. And when I am angry at the injustice of the world, I can know that God will judge evil and make everything right. And when I am discouraged at my sin because I hate it, and I want to put it to death, but it just erupted out of me again like it's a part of my nature, I can remember: there will be a day when it won't rise up like a zombie out of my heart. And when I ache to see Jesus and touch him and hug him and I'm discouraged because I know him, but I don't know him enough, I can have hope because one day I will see him face to face and my faith will be made sight.

That is the future hope of the glory of God. A Christian can only have access to present joy because it's rooted in future hope.

Now all of this is wonderful. But if you're at all skeptical about Christianity, then everything I've said might just sound like a nice fairytale. Perhaps you wish it were true. (That's half the battle. So many don't believe because they don't want it to be true). But Christianity isn't wishful thinking! It is rooted in objectivity and certainty! Our present joy and our future hope rest in real, historical truth. They have been bought and guaranteed by Jesus' death.

#### **IV. Bought by Jesus' Death in the Past (v 6-8)**

That's what Paul goes on to teach in verse 6-8: <sup>6</sup>For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup>For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— <sup>8</sup>but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

For Paul, the death of Christ was an objective reality. Remember, this is something that happened within his lifetime. He knew people who had lived with Jesus, who had been present at the crucifixion. This is not some distant historical question mark for Paul. And it is the same for us. You may have read a popular book or followed a rabbit hole online that made you believe it's up for debate among scholars and historians about whether or not Jesus lived and died. But this is, across the board, not true among serious scholars. Even among unbelieving scholars, no one denies the historical reality of Jesus Christ. And what's more, many scholars will tell you that the Jesus of the Bible is not a false representation of Jesus. When we read the gospels, there is ample evidence to believe he actually said and did the things the gospels say he said and did. And if the Jesus of history taught all these things in the bible, then we have to grapple with his teachings. C.S. Lewis said,

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic... or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. . . . Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and

consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God.<sup>3</sup>

Friends, we can be certain and convinced that Christ, God made flesh, died on the cross. And this demonstration of God's love is what purchased the things that Paul cited at the beginning of our text. We have peace with God, even though we were his enemies. We stand in his grace, we have access to salvation as free gift, we have future hope, we have present joy... all resting on the reality that at the right time, 2,000 years ago, God became man and dwelt among us, lived the life we could not live, and died the death that we deserve on the cross.

## V. Kept Forever by Jesus' life (v 9-11)

And Paul isn't finished there. Because a Christian's joy is not just rooted in a future hope that rests on Christ's death in the past. A Christian's joy and hope is also kept forever by Jesus' life.

It's Easter and you've been waiting for me to get to the resurrection and we're finally here. This is why the resurrection is at the very center of the Christian faith! Because Paul wants us to see that if the death of Christ has purchased all these things for us how much more will his life give us! Look at verse 9-11.

<sup>9</sup> Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Christ died to pay for our sin and give us peace with God, but if that's all that happened then we wouldn't have assurance that his death was effective. Paul says in another part of the NT that if Christ stayed dead, we Christians are most to be pitied. But he didn't stay dead! Three days later he rose from the grave. And friends, if God showed his love for us while we were still sinners; how much more when the stain of sin is removed and our debt is paid, how much more will the resurrection life of Jesus Christ save us to the uttermost! And notice, it's not just the event of resurrection of Jesus that we celebrate today. Paul doesn't just say "saved by his resurrection" but "saved by his life." It's the fact that Christ is risen from the grave, conqueror of death, and he's alive now and alive permanently, ascended and enthroned in heaven. And because he lives forever, he is able to preserve for eternity the salvation he gives. The book of Hebrews says "he *always lives* to make intercession" for us. (Heb 7:25)

Friends it is the life of Jesus that leads Paul to this audacious conclusion that we have a future hope and a present joy even in the midst of suffering. Christian history tells of the martyrdom of Polycarp; one of the early church fathers. He was a disciple of the Apostle John and followed Jesus for 86 years, serving as a pastor and a bishop in the early church. Then one day he was arrested for refusing to worship the Roman emperor and burned at the stake. Before his death he said, "How then can I blaspheme my King and Savior? You threaten me with a fire that burns for a season, and after a little while is quenched; but you are ignorant of the fire of everlasting punishment that is prepared for

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<sup>3</sup> Mere Christianity, 55-56

the wicked.” And he went on the go to his death thanking God for being judged worthy to suffer for the name of Christ.

It's an amazing story. But it's not an uncommon story in Christian history. And the reason Polycarp, and myriads of Christians throughout the ages can glory in their suffering is because he knew the love of God which had been shown to him in the cross of Jesus Christ and he knew that the God who had paid for his sin with his blood would keep him and much, much more with his life. The living Jesus keeps forever the joy and hope that he purchased for you in he death and resurrection.

Would you worship him for the way he is keeping you? Would you worship him for his death and his resurrection life? Would you trust him and put your faith in him to fuel a tenacious joy for today and a hope for eternity?

Let's pray.