

Christians, We have Reason to Rejoice!

- I. Rejoice in God's gifts
- II. Rejoice in our sufferings

1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we[a] have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we[b] boast in the hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only so, but we[c] also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! 10 For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! 11 Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Tell me, have you ever had someone say to you, "Good morning!" and you thought to yourself, "I don't know what's so good about it? I mean, I didn't get enough sleep last night. The kids were arguing at the breakfast table. The news on TV is all bad. I have more things to do than I'll ever have time to do. It may be morning, but I wouldn't call it good." Sometimes it happens, doesn't it? The circumstances in our lives leave us feeling down and discouraged and overwhelmed by it all. And of course, sometimes it's not just a bad day that triggers those emotions. Sometimes it's a whole week or a month or a year of bad days. For many people, isn't at what this past year of the pandemic has felt like, one bad day after another? After a while, it just starts to wear a person down. It's like, "Are things ever going to get better? Is there anything to be hopeful about? Anything that can kind of lift our spirits? Anything that can change our attitude on life?"

Actually, there is. But I have to tell you up front, it may not be a change in your circumstances in life. Your kids may still argue at the breakfast table. The news coming out of Washington may still be all bad. And COVID-19 or its successor, may be around for years to come. No, the key to maintaining a positive attitude in life, the key to feeling joy even in the face of trials and suffering, is to step back and look at the big picture. To see our lives not as we see them, but as God sees them. To focus not so much on the circumstances of our lives, but focus on what God has done for us, and in us, according to his good plan and purpose. Our text for today gives us the perfect opportunity to do that. Here in Romans chapter 5, the Apostle Paul

says, in effect:

Christians, we have reason to rejoice!

We have reason to: I. Rejoice in God's gifts.

But we also have reason to: II. Rejoice, in our suffering.

St Paul begins this chapter with these words, *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith....* With those words, Paul is basically summarizing everything he's written in the four chapters leading up to this point. In Romans 1-4, Paul makes two main points. 1. By nature, everyone is a sinner. As Paul puts it, *There is no one righteous, not even one. (Romans 3:10)*. In other words, no matter how hard we try, no matter what we do, we cannot live up to God's standards. Time and again, we prove that we are, by nature, ungodly. We show that we love ourselves more than we love God. That's why Paul says, *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)*. Right? It's as if God has said, "All you have to do to earn your spot in heaven is to jump the Grand Canyon." Well, no matter how far we jump, the fact is, we're going down. We are powerless to bridge that gap between ourselves and God.

But then what did God do? Paul tells us here in our text. *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.* In effect, Jesus jumped in and went down in our place, all the way to hell, to suffer the penalty for every sin in the world. And in place of the world's sin, he now offers us his righteousness, his holiness. The only question is, who gets credit for Jesus' righteousness? Who gets to apply Jesus' righteousness, Jesus' holiness to their personal account? The answer: those who believe it. That's the second point that Paul makes in Romans 1-4. Paul puts it this way, *But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. (Romans 3:21-22)*. In other words, our good standing with God comes not by our doing our best to obey the Ten Commandments. No, our good standing with God comes by believing that Jesus perfectly obeyed the Ten Commandments in our place. Jesus' righteousness becomes our righteousness through faith. That's what St Paul means when he says, *We maintain that a person is justified (that is, a person is declared not guilty in God's eyes) by faith, apart from the works of the law. (Romans 3:28)* That doctrine is called justification by faith. It's the heart of the gospel. Luther called it the one doctrine on which the Christian Church stands or falls.

The question is, so what does that fact have to do with our lives today? That's exactly the question that Paul answers here in our text. In fact, it's why he begins this entire section with the words, *therefore, since we have been justified through faith.* In other words, since that is true, what does that mean for our heart and lives and attitudes today? Well, first, according to St. Paul, it means, *we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.* Now, we may be tempted to just skip over those words. Don't. Let them sink in. You realize, you were once God's enemy. By nature, you and I hated God. We wanted nothing to do with him. And God had every reason to hate us, for the way we treated him. But what does Paul say here in our text? *When we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his son.* The barrier of sin that once stood between us and God has been broken down by Jesus' suffering and death. Jesus has reconciled us to our Father. We are once again at one with God. That's why Paul says that *we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

But Paul goes on: *through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.* You might say, that's the second gift that we can enjoy as God's justified people. We have access to God's grace. In fact, Paul says that we now stand in God's grace. Can you picture that scene? Imagine standing in a room where all four walls, the ceiling, the floor, are all

God's grace. You're absolutely surrounded by God's undeserved love for you. You are living in a constant state of forgiveness. Sometimes people think of forgiveness as something that we have to earn, or it's something we have to ask God for when we really need it. No, the forgiveness of our sins is something that we already have, in Christ. You live in a constant state of grace. Isn't that empowering? To know that even if you didn't get everything done on your to-do list, even if you totally blew the conversation with your kids, even if you fell into that same old sin, the fact is, you're not under God's condemnation. You're under the umbrella of God's grace. You're surrounded by God's grace.

But there's one more thing that gives you and me reason to rejoice. Paul tells us here in our text, *and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God*. Isn't that right? In light of what Jesus has done for us in the past, we look forward to a bright, bright future, when we will not only see God in all his glory, but we will share in that glory with bodies that will be glorified. I mean, doesn't that fact make it a bit easier to deal with a body that right now seems to be wearing out? When it seems like the only trips you are making are to the doctor's office, when you feel like your get up and go must have got up and went? It's okay, because the day is coming when we will enjoy bodies that will never wear out, bodies that will enjoy life in the presence of God forever.

All these things give you and me reason to rejoice in what God has given us in Christ. And yet, here in our text, Paul says that God has not only given us reason to rejoice in his gifts. He's given us reason to II. Rejoice in our sufferings. Paul put it this way: *Not only so* (in other words, not only do we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God), *but we also rejoice in our sufferings*. Now you hear those words and you say "Why would anyone rejoice in their sufferings? Are we some kind of masochists, who enjoy pain being inflicted on us?"

No, it's not that we enjoy the pain of suffering. It's that we've come to appreciate the positive impact that suffering can have on us. For example, Paul says that *we know that suffering produces perseverance*. The Greek word here for suffering is "thlipsis". It literally means "the squeeze or the pressure." It's the weight of the various burdens that we have to carry in life, whether they are physical or mental or emotional or spiritual. You might say it's the picture of the dumbbell which weighs down on the bicep. But what does Scripture say? *Suffering produces perseverance*. The Greek word here is "hypomone" It literally means to hold up under something. As the dumbbell weighs down on the muscle, the muscle contracts to hold up under it. So it is with trials and tribulations in our lives. With God's help, suffering produces perseverance and in turn, Paul says, *perseverance produces character*. The Greek word here refers to something that has been tested and has passed the test. Often times that is applied to gold that has been refined by the fire. The fire burns off the impurities to make the end product even more valuable. Sometimes suffering can have the same effect on our faith. As our faith is tested by trials, it forces us to lean more heavily on God and his promises. So then, in the end our faith becomes stronger. Isn't that what Saint Paul learned through his struggles with his thorn in the flesh? He says that when he was weak he had to lean on God's grace, so that in the end he was stronger because of it. *Suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character and character hope*. And as Paul puts it, *hope does not disappoint us*.

Isn't that right? When we put our hope and trust in God, we will not be disappointed. We will not be embarrassed or put to shame. God's promises are not empty promises. Even if our earthly lives are hard, even if we have to carry our cross, as Jesus said in our gospel reading, the fact is, our faith will not be in vain. How do we know that? Paul says, *because God has poured out his love into our hearts*. In so many ways, God pours out his love into our hearts. In the washing of holy baptism, he adopts us into his family. He writes us into his will and gives us an

inheritance in heaven. In Jesus' body and blood, God renews his covenant with us, transmitting to us in a very tangible way the forgiveness he personally won for us on the cross. In his word, God piles one promise on top of another. He tells us through the prophet Isaiah, for example, *Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed, says the Lord who has compassion on you. (Isaiah 54:10)*. All of these are ways in which God the Holy Spirit pours out his love into our hearts. Notice, Paul doesn't say that God dribbles his love a little bit at a time. No, God pours it into our hearts. He overwhelms us with it. How does St John put it? *How great is the love the father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God (1 John 3:1)*. Isn't that the truth? If you think about it, God's greatest act of love is not that he's given us food and clothing, family and friends, good health and gainful employment—because the fact is, he may take all those things away. No, God's greatest act of love is found right there, on a cross. How did John put it? *This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1 John 4:10)* Or as St. Paul puts it here in our text, *God demonstrated his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)*

My friends that's what changes everything. It changes our attitude on life. Oh, it may not change our circumstances in life. The kids may still fight at the breakfast table. The bills may still be waiting for you when you get home. Death may still take a loved one from you this year. But none of those things changes who you are in God's eyes. Yes, you are a sinner. but you are a sinner who is dearly loved by God, a God who loved you so much that he gave you his one and only to make you his own, to make you right in his eyes, so you can know that your sins are forgiven and heaven is your home and even the crosses you can are going to serve a good purpose, namely, to draw you closer to God, to strengthen your faith, and in the end deepen your hope in the good and perfect plan God has for your life. All of which gives you and me as Christians reason to rejoice. Or to put it another way, no matter how hard your morning is, when someone says to you, "Good morning," you have every reason to say, "Yes, it certainly is!" All because of what God has done for us in Christ our Lord. Amen.