

Romans 5v1-11 Given joy and peace and hope

‘What do you think of me?’ It’s a huge question that we all ask repeatedly. ‘What will they think of me if I say I’m a Christian?’ ‘What will my friends think of me if I take a stand that goes against the norm?’ ‘What will they think of me if I wear this?’ ‘What will my family think of me when they find out I’ve let them down?’ ‘What will my church family think of me when they know I’ve been struggling with this?’ ‘What will my kids think of me when...?’ That question ‘What do you think of me?’ has a huge influence on our lives, loves, likes, actions, and reactions.

But here’s a more important question; ‘What does God think of you?’ I wonder how you answer that. Our answer matters because that question also influences how we live, it even has the power to transform our concern over how others think of us. How does God think about you? Pleased? Angry? Disappointed? Indifferent? How we answer that question will determine how we live; whether we’re terrified of death and facing God, whether we feel guilty and live life burdened by a need to atone for our disappointing God, or whether we’re joyfully at rest in how God thinks about us.

Romans 1-4 shows us what God thinks of us and why. **Ch1** humanity refuses to glorify or thank God. Instead we worship anything else we can and God, rightly, is angry. **Ch2** our stubbornness and refusal to repent means we store up God’s anger and one day will face his judgement. **Ch3** reinforces that; **“There is no-one righteous, not even one; there is no-one who understands; there is no-one who seeks God.”** Just let that repeated “no-one” sink in. You are not the exception that proves the rule, there are no exceptions! No-one is righteous. To claim otherwise is to call God a liar, and puts you in opposition to him, one of the no-ones after all. And **3v20 “no-one will be declared righteous by observing the law...”** That’s crushing isn’t it? By nature we reject God, we refuse to recognise him or worship him, though we’ll take all we can get from him. And we can’t earn our way back to a right relationship with God. How does God feel about me? About my family and friends?

But the great news of Romans follows that damning diagnosis. **3v23-24 “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”** How God thinks about us can change, not because of what we do, but by faith in what Jesus has done for us. **A friend of mine at his wedding practice tweaked the line in the vows because he was student to say “all my debt I give to you”.** That is what Romans teaches we only bring our need of salvation, our debt. Jesus brings his riches which cover our debt. Jesus doesn’t do 90% and we do 10%, Jesus does 100% of the work of our salvation. We stand condemned Jesus justifies us. **4v25 “He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.”** Jesus dies in our place for our sin, we get credited with his perfect record so that God looks at us and sees us just-as-if-I’d never sinned.

How does God feel about you? If we’ve repented and trusted in Jesus as our only saviour then God sees us united to Christ and is pleased with us. But what difference does our justification make? What changes? What are the implications of that? That’s what Paul inspired by the Spirit turns to now.

We are at peace and full of hope.

(1) Paul applies justification to the believers in Rome. He wants them to see that justification practically it changes everything because justification brings with it a transformation in who we are and our relationship with God.

“since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God.” Rom 1-3 paints a bleak picture of our relationship with God. We’re his enemies, we take all the stuff he gives and not content with being ungrateful we write God out of the very universe he made. We deny his existence and instead worship the things he creates instead of him. Instead of listening to the creator’s life giving word we claim he is a killjoy just out to frustrate us and stop us doing what we want. And rightly God is angry at that and all the hurt and pain and loss that flows from that. God hates sin and yet we love it and cherish it. We are at war with God and our judgement is certain. But when we trust Jesus we aren’t just declared justified our relationship with God changes. Jesus doesn’t declare a ceasefire, he doesn’t sit the warring parties down at the table for peace talks, Jesus give us peace with God. That word peace is ‘shalom’, a wholeness, a right relationship where there are no barriers only welcome.

This is so much bigger than our word peace. We are assured of a warm welcome with God, made right with him. And it is all ours through our Lord Jesus Christ. We stand before God in grace by faith. Faith in Jesus ushers us into God’s presence where we are welcomed with undeserved favour. And it is all given to us by faith in Jesus. We don’t have to earn it, we can’t merit it, and we can’t lose it. Do you see the significance of this? This is undeserved favour, we can’t deserve it, we can only enjoy it and live loving the one who gave it to us.

How does God think of you? Undeserved favour because of Jesus if I have put my faith in him. But that’s not all. Our present standing with God is transformed but so is our future. **(2b)“And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.”** Justified we now have a future hope that is certain, we have a present joyful confidence that when God is revealed in all his glory and splendour we won’t just not be judged but will be welcomed by our Father to share in his glory.

Our present sufferings are transformed

Our world is broken, justification changes us, but it doesn’t transform the world. What it ought to do is change how we react with the world especially when it comes to suffering. There are two ways we can react to suffering; it can sap our faith or strengthen it. Both options are open to us every time we suffer. Paul wants the Romans, and us, to react rightly to suffering, to have it transformed by our justification.

All suffering reveals the presence of the enemy, it reminds us of the way he tempted Adam and Eve and the catastrophic effects of sin on every level of the created universe. And all suffering is an attack on our relationship with God; Father, Son and Spirit. Satan loves to crowd and buffet God’s people, to shake us, to make us shrink in on ourselves curled around and nursing our hurt and loss, to make us cherish our pain so that it cuts us off from God and from others. He uses it to try to undermine our confidence in God, to make us doubt God’s love or to question our standing before God and even our justification.

Here and in Romans 8, at the head and tail of this middle section of Romans, Paul wants believers to know how to stand when suffering comes. To know how to view suffering in

light of our justification, how to answer Satan's attempts to undermine our faith, and instead to see how God is so sovereign he works good even through Satan's efforts.

“Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings,” That word glory is the same word translated boast in **(2, 11)**. It speaks of a joyful confidence, a rejoicing. How can we do that? This change in attitude flows from our being justified, from being made right with God, from being assured that God views us with undeserved favour. Because if we know that we are right with God in Jesus we can see that God is at work in our suffering, that we aren't suffering needlessly but productively. Satan might want to use it to swamp us and shrink our faith. But God wants to work to produce change, to bring perseverance – enduring faith – character – tested and proven patience that tenaciously trusts God and hope, hope that doesn't put us to shame because it is certain.

The biggest danger for us when we suffer is that we believe Satan's lie that God doesn't love us. That somehow this is unloving punishment. That this proves God is unloving, that we are alone, or that somehow we now need to earn our way back into a right relationship with God.

(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.” God knows that danger, he knows how Satan works. And so into the hearts of his justified people he pours out the Spirit as a guarantee of his love. We'll think more about this when we come to ch8, about some of the ways the Spirit works in us and through us, how he points us again and again to God's love, and our adoption and standing before God in suffering. God loves his people even in suffering and is at work through it by the Spirit.

There is a present experience of God's love. But the Spirit also acts like a floodlight lighting up the most significant demonstration of God's love in all of history **(6-8)**. God's love for us is proven once for all when Jesus died for us when we were his enemies, when we could do nothing to save ourselves. If someone is good we might die to save them, but God's love is so great that the Father sent the Son when we were his enemies, Christ's love was so great that he came and died for sinners. When we suffer we can know that God loves us because he has shown us in the greatest act of love in history.

The Holy Spirit within us day by day testifies to this love. Suffering does not separate us from God's love, it doesn't call into question our standing before God. Rather we know that God loves us, and so even now in our suffering God is at work.

How does God think of you? Suffering doesn't change that for God's people. I am loved and accepted, justified and welcome to stand in undeserved favour, and God is at work to produce perseverance, character and hope because he loves me.

How are you responding to suffering? For some of us this morning we just need to drink in these Spirit inspired words. In your suffering God loves you and is at work. It is purposeful not pointless. It does not change or challenge your justification, welcome or hope. Because God has shown he loves you once for all at the cross.

For others of us it highlights our need to repent of believing Satan's lies, of forgetting or doubting God loves us because of our suffering. We need to come back to Calvary and see his love and know his forgiveness and welcome.

We are reconciled and so will be saved

Paul isn't finished yet, there's more. **“Since we have been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him.”** Justification means we don't need to fear God's wrath, we are safe from judgement. And **(10)** we are reconciled to God and his death and resurrection proves there is no more wrath for us to face. The resurrection joyfully proclaims that Jesus sacrifice was enough. And so **(11)** we have a joyful confidence in God through Jesus. The enmity is ended, God's wrath is satisfied, we are right with God. Jesus changed everything and by faith in him we are reconciled, we stand by grace, we are welcomed when we deserved judgement, loved when we deserved wrath and we are certain in our hope.

Past justification and present reconciliation guarantee our future salvation. We need to let these truths change us. We will be saved, we will be welcomed. Our best life is not here, it is yet to come in eternity. Our hope is certain.

How does God think of me? It all depends on whether you have repented and put your trust in Jesus. If you haven't yet then see what is yours if you do; no more guilt, no striving to earn what you cannot, peace and welcome.

If we've repented and trusted Jesus we have been justified and everything changes. Peace with God is not circumstantial, it's not up and down dependent on our performance, in Jesus we stand before God in undeserved favour, we are reconciled, we are welcomed. Don't listen to Satan's lies come to your Father.

When we are suffering we need to apply this truth to one another. Suffering doesn't call into question God's love, God's love is not circumstantial, it is certain; demonstrated once for all on a cross on a hill outside Jerusalem. The Spirit within us testifies to that truth. God loves us and is even at work in our suffering. Our future is certain: when Christ returns and God's kingdom comes we will not face his wrath but experience our Father's welcome. We won't be outside but invited in to share in the glory of God for eternity.