

Peace and Hope

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 January 2019

Preacher: Martin Ayers

[0 : 00] Our Bible reading can be found on page 1132, and we're reading from Romans chapter 5, verse 1 to 11, page 1132, Romans 5.

Let us read God's word. Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.

And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character, and character hope.

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.

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rare will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die.

[1 : 33] But God demonstrates his own love for us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we now have been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him?

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?

Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Thanks, Alan, very much for reading.

If you could keep your Bibles open at Romans chapter 5, page 1132, that would be a great help to me as we look at that together. Just to mention, I don't know what TV you watched over Christmas and New Year, but I would recommend a program, My Faith and Me.

[2 : 46] It was about Gavin Peacock. It's a series. What else I've seen of the series, it's been not very good. But each week follows a different person. Gavin Peacock is a terrific Christian man.

And it was amazing to have that on the BBC, him explaining the gospel, talking about how he stepped back from, he was in professional football and then he was a football pundit and he went to be a church pastor.

And John Mottson on there just saying, we just couldn't believe you gave all of that up. And a terrific thing to watch, especially if you've got children who are into sport, to hear a guy speaking really positively about sport, but how showing that Jesus was the main thing in his life.

So a great thing to watch, My Faith and Me, on iPlayer. We're in Romans chapter 5. Let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Let's pray together. David says in Psalm 16, I said to the Lord, You are my Lord.

Apart from you, I have no good thing. Heavenly Father, please speak to us now in the power of your spirit. And align our hearts with your word, so that we are the people of joy we should be, because your truth sinks in and directs our heads, our hearts and our lives.

[4 : 01] For Jesus' name's sake. Amen. So I remember a friend saying to me that he was reading the Bible with a homeless guy, and he said to the homeless guy, Why don't we read Romans together?

And he encouraged him to read Romans on his own as well. He gave him a Bible. And the guy came back the next time and said, I've stopped reading that book Romans, you know. And my friend asked, Why was it too complicated?

And he said, No, it's not too complicated. It's too powerful. And hopefully if you've been with us, we've had a sense of that as a church the last couple of months. Romans is a powerful book of the Bible.

It's truth that cuts right into you. We've heard how desperately every human being needs to hear the gospel, the saving news about Jesus, his death, his resurrection.

For none of us is good enough for God on our own. And instead, the judgment of God hangs over every person, every person we meet, every person in the world who doesn't know a Christian around them.

[5 : 00] The judgment of God hangs on them, for we are not good enough for God. And then wonderfully, the release came in chapter 3. Chapter 3, verse 21. We heard this great, But now, we couldn't be good enough for God on our own.

But Jesus has come, and he's died the death we should have died in our place, bearing the weight of God's sin, so that we can be made right with God. We can be justified in the language of the Bible, that God approves of us.

So the opening words are here in chapter 5. Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, simply by trusting God's promise. And our passage this morning is all about hope, future hope.

Now, hope is quite a feeble word today, isn't it? We don't really think much of hope. We plan a walk, and we might say, oh, I hope the weather is good. Or you buy a ticket to see Partick Thistle, and you think, well, I hope they score a goal.

It's feeble. But the hope we hear about in the Bible, in Romans 5, is a life-transforming thing to get a grip on. Why do we think of hope as feeble? Well, one reason is that we live in the present, and now, you know, we've got smartphones.

[6 : 11] Everything is immediate for us now. And the idea that we're looking forward to something, that we've got to wait for, it doesn't really appeal to us. But Christian hope breaks into the present. That's our first point this morning.

The personal joy of Christian hope. Three times in these 11 verses, Paul mentions joy. He says, we rejoice. But the weird thing is, in our translations of the Bible, each time, it gets translated as a different word.

In the Greek, it's always, we rejoice, or we boast. It's the same word. So Paul is describing here a present life of joy for the Christian.

And why is it? Well, he tells us in verse 1, Since we've been justified through faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith, into this grace in which we now stand.

And we boast, we rejoice, in the hope of the glory of God. We've got peace with God to enjoy, for the future, but now as well.

[7 : 15] We know that no matter what we've done, no matter how ashamed we are of past actions, our past attitudes, the way we've hurt somebody, our pride, our selfishness, our lust, our greed, violence, betrayals, debt.

Despite all of that, we have peace. Because we have peace with God. We've been made right with Him by His action. We made ourselves His enemies, but He has cleared everything away so that we can be friends with Him again.

We're reconciled. It's not a fragile peace, like the peace in Syria or in the Ukraine, where we're still planning ahead for if things go wrong again.

No, this is guaranteed and lasting peace that we can truly rest in. I don't know whether you've ever experienced that peace on offer from God. I can vividly remember how differently I felt the first time I understood that peace.

I was 21 and someone explained to me on a course like Life Explored that Jesus had died for me. And the next day, just having this flood of peace, and I just felt so different.

[8 : 19] It was like the first day of spring when the sun shines in on a cold day and you feel warm in a different and new way. I was amazed that I could have peace with God. Martin Luther says about Paul's writing here in Romans 5, the apostle speaks as one who is extremely happy and full of joy.

In verse 2, he connects the peace in the present with hope in the future. Peter, we boast in the hope of the glory of God. In chapter 3, he summarized the great predicament that we're all in.

He said, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. We fall short of that glory. And now he says that when you put your trust in Jesus, you can rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

That one day we'll stand before God in all of his brilliance. The glory of God is his brilliance. And we'll stand in that and we'll have nothing to fear. No condemnation.

And he'll make us glorious as well so that our future life with him will be one where he transforms us to be the men and women that he made us to be. So what's the main mark of a Christian?

[9 : 28] How can you spot a Christian in the crowd? It's by their joy. And I guess in Scotland today, lots of people wouldn't think that, would they? How do you spot a Christian? They'd maybe think, well, look out for the pious people, the self-righteous people, the guilty-looking people, the strict people.

But if we can get the truth of Romans to sink in to our hearts, then you'd spot us by our joy, infectious joy, that people would see in us.

And joy is something so much deeper than happiness. All around us we can find things that will make us happy, I'm sure of that. But the thing is that happiness is fleeting.

It doesn't last. I was back where I grew up on Teesside last week for New Year's. So we had a takeaway from my favourite curry house. It's an epic curry house.

And we had this New Year's Eve curry, and it was absolutely amazing. But the thing is, I'm not still buzzing about it today. The happiness from that curry has gone.

[10 : 30] It's true of lots of everyday things. You know, your football team winning, or a big match, or the pleasure of going out on a good run, or a good bike ride, a meal with family, getting away with friends for the weekend.

We love these things. They're special. But the happiness wears off. If we have them all the time, we become immune to the pleasure. And the living God here offers us a joy that is rooted in a future hope.

But to savour it, we have to make the time to spend in communion with God and appreciate it. So Paul links that future joy in the present to our personal relationship with God.

In verse 11, it's another mention of rejoicing. Verse 11, not only is this so, but we also rejoice, we boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

So let me ask you to challenge yourself. How can I step into that joy in this new year? You can't get it all from a sermon.

[11 : 35] Is there some way that you could push yourself in this new year with a new challenge to make the most of communion with God, of that relationship with God, so that you grow in this joy that we have?

Is it that you could commit yourself to a devotional time, five mornings a week, 15 minutes a day, five minutes to read the Bible, five minutes to think about it, five minutes to pray?

Or is it that you could commit to a midweek fellowship group as growth groups begin again, as roots begins? Or to a prayer triplet, maybe you could find two friends and meet with them once every few weeks for accountability and support and prayer.

How could you invest in time with God so that you can say, like Paul said, we rejoice in God, that personal relationship.

That's our first point, the personal joy of Christian hope. But we might still be thinking, I haven't got time for that. I've got enough problems in my life right now without thinking about future hope.

[12 : 37] Well, secondly, we see the personal joy. Sorry, secondly, we see the astonishing power of Christian hope. We get this extraordinary statement from Paul in verse three.

He says, not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings. It's that same word again, not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings. Now, I know if you're someone who's going through a difficult time, that is a hard thing to hear, isn't it?

But we need to remember that Paul knew very well that suffering is not easy. He'd been imprisoned, flogged, he was shipwrecked, he was insulted, he had to flee from cities, he was emotionally burdened by the churches that he planted and cared for.

He's not naive about suffering. But it sounds like a contradiction, doesn't it? What is suffering? Suffering, if anything, it's the things you enjoy being taken away from you.

That's what suffering is. How can you rejoice in that? Well, only if the real heartbeat in our lives, the real source of ultimate joy, is something that nothing else can ever take away.

[13 : 47] And more than that, if you have a look at verse 3, he says, we also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance. Perseverance, character, and character, hope.

Suffering in itself is not good, but we rejoice in how God can use suffering, how he can change us through it. In verse 3, suffering makes us persevere.

We endure. It clears our head and fixes our minds on what we know that we can never lose, the future that we're hoping in. And then that endurance or perseverance, it changes us on the inside, so it produces tested character.

And that increases our hope because it gives us confidence. When we see that we're responding differently to suffering now because of our faith, it assures us that we are really Christians and that builds our hope within us.

And then the ultimate result through suffering and perseverance and tested character is greater hope. So when something is taken away from us, even though that's painful, it can fix our gaze on our future hope and grow that hope within us.

[15 : 03] It's worth just comparing that with the alternative, with not being a Christian. Suffering is inevitable in your life. It will come to all of us. And if you don't believe in God, I think it's much harder not to be crushed by suffering.

If you're an atheist, you might choose simply to live for pleasure. Other people might think that's selfish, but you might decide to choose the path of hedonism and live for personal pleasure.

That's the thing that gives your life meaning. Well, if that's what you choose to do, suffering is devastating, isn't it? Because it takes away what you're ultimately living for.

So without God, we have to find something else to live for. We need something to live for that's bigger than ourselves. So what's the point of our lives without God?

What are we aiming for? Well, people might say, well, I'm building my life or my career because it does good for others. It helps other people. It creates wealth.

[16 : 04] It creates jobs. But if we do that, why are we really doing that? Death is going to take all of that away. Or is the ultimate point not a career, but your personal relationships?

Well, again, the people around us are going to die. Is it to secure a better world for future generations so that we feel that what we do now will live on beyond the people around us today?

Well, again, if you look into the more distant future, all of that is a complete waste of time. We're all going to be dust. On the TV series *The Human Universe*, Brian Cox explained to us as an atheist what the future looks like.

He said, eventually the sun will burn out, the stars will burn out, and the energy in our universe will dissipate, and the universe will go through this cooling process so that eventually there's no movement of energy left in the universe, and time becomes meaningless because nothing's happening.

Of course, life is long gone. There's nobody to observe that anymore. Nobody will be left. So the atheist philosopher Thomas Nagel says this about his problem with the atheist worldview.

[17 : 19] He said this, the problem is that ultimately it will not matter if you had never existed, and after you have gone out of existence, it will not matter that you did exist.

See what he's saying? Ultimately, no matter how noble what you build your life on seems, without God, the future is so bleak, it's a complete waste of time.

So if you're an atheist, how do you still have a meaningful life if that future is ahead of all of us? The only answer that works is not to think about it, to ignore the future.

There was a great Supreme Court judge in the US, Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., and he wrote to a friend, he said, if one thinks coldly, that was his phrase, if you think coldly about it, there is no reason to treat a human being as any more significant than a baboon or a grain of sand.

But then he said, when he starts to think like that, it's time to go downstairs and play solitaire. You see what he's saying? What he describes as thinking coldly is just thinking rationally as a non-believer in God about how bleak human life is, how insignificant we are.

[18 : 33] And he says, when you feel like that, you've just got to distract yourself. Go and play a game. Don't think about the implications. He's saying that if you really believe what he believed, that human life evolved randomly and accidentally, you can't get meaning for daily life.

You just have to bury your head in the sand about that. Well, in complete contrast, we're seeing in Romans 5 that Christian faith works in the opposite way. That if the Christian is hurt or in despair, if we experience loss and sadness, the way forward is not to think less, it's to think more.

You have to think more deeply and strongly about the implications of what we really believe about the future. That our hope of glory is secure. We're going to spend forever with God.

And even today, day by day, we can rejoice in a personal relationship with God. The God who loves us and has made peace with us through Jesus Christ. And for my money, this has really counted.

When I, six years ago, I was very ill and these verses from Romans 5 were some of the most valuable to me in the whole Bible. I had this brain tumor, it was giving me epilepsy, I had to have surgery, we went to see the surgeon, he said, you might go blind from the surgery, you might die in the surgery.

[19 : 54] And in the midst of that, it was so valuable to reflect on Romans chapter 5 that I have a hope of the glory of God that is secure. So that if I was going to die, for me, it would actually be much better.

So friends, God can work in us even through real frustration, even through immense loss, to fix our eyes on that future hope that is guaranteed for us and that nothing can take away.

So that suffering can be a catalyst in your life for nurturing true and lasting joy in your hearts. That's the astonishing power of Christian hope.

We all need hope and the God of the Bible here is offering us a gift, a hope so secure, nothing you suffer in this life can take it from you. So how do we know the hope is so secure?

It's about the future. Isn't the future uncertain? Well, that's our third point, the certain ground of Christian hope. Paul tells us that we can have assurance and it starts as a personal, subjective confidence in verse 5.

[21 : 04] He says, and hope does not put us to shame, that is, hope does not disappoint us, it's well grounded, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

The Spirit that God gives us when we put our trust in Jesus makes us aware personally that God loves us. And sometimes, for Christians, it's when we feel most at rock bottom, most in pain, that we also feel most aware that our Heavenly Father surrounds us with His love, that He's got hold of us and He won't let go.

But how does the Spirit give us that assurance in our hearts when our experience around us tells us otherwise? we might feel that looking at our circumstances, it doesn't really seem that God does love us.

And yet, we sense by the Spirit that He does. Well, how does the Spirit do that? He takes our gaze off our present suffering and points it back to the cross.

If you just look with me at verse 6, you see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

[22 : 19] Paul says Christ died at just the right time. He doesn't mean it was the right day and the right month and the right year. He means for every one of us in the story of our lives, the death of Jesus came when we needed it most, when we were in grave danger because the wrath of God hung over us because of our sin.

And then verse 7 is such a special verse, isn't it? We get contrasted how unlikely it would be that anyone would ever have died for us. Verse 7, very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die.

You see what he's saying, if someone was a really great guy, maybe you would actually give your life for them because they're just so great. But the thing is, you really weren't a great guy.

That's what he's saying, none of us was. Verse 8, but God demonstrates his own love for us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. And then how costly it was for God to do that, to love and forgive us.

Verse 6, Christ died. Verse 8, Christ died. Verse 9, we've been justified by his blood. Verse 10, reconciled to God through the death of his son.

[23 : 34] In other words, the father had to listen to his son, Jesus, as he bore the agony of Gethsemane, the agony in the garden, as he prayed with sweat pouring off him like drops of blood, as he stared forward into the abyss of what he would face the next day, forsaken by his heavenly father.

The father heard the son's cry to take this cup away from him, but he knew this was the only way to rescue us. And he loves us. So we look back at the cross and we can be so assured.

God surely will keep his promises now. If he was willing to do that when we were still treating him as we were, how confident, how certain we can be that he will be for us in the future.

The greater work has already been done. That's how Paul argues on in verse 9. If you have a look, since we've now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him?

And again, how much more? 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?

[24 : 49] He's just saying, it's secure now. Look at what's already happened. I've got, just a trivial example, but when you're watching a Formula One race, the race leader has often gone through real difficulties to get into the lead.

And often what happens is they come into the last lap and if they're quite far ahead, when the checkered flag gets waved, if they're winning by a long way, they slow right down and they make the last lap like a lap of honour.

And when I was a boy watching Formula One, I used to get really nervous because I think, well, what if they crash? What if the other cars catch up with them? And I needed to be reassured, they know what they're doing.

Having done all that hard work to win the race, they will win it now. It's fine. They're on the home straight now. The hard work has been done and they've showed how much they wanted to win by all the hard work they put in.

They were determined. Trust them. And Paul says here, look how determined God has already demonstrated he is in history to reconcile you to him.

[25 : 49] Even when you were his enemy. Look at what it cost him. He was determined. Having done that, now that he calls you his friend, surely now he will finish the work.

And so we're fully assured, fully confident, and that gives us joy. No other religion could give you this certainty about the future.

When you trust in Christ, you're never asking yourself, faced with death, have I done enough? You don't need to ask, have I done enough?

He did enough. And he will finish what he started. So could I ask you to think, is there somebody that I need to encourage with Romans chapter 5 today?

When somebody we know who's a Christian is struggling and we're aware of it, I guess there's a few dangers, aren't there? One is that we don't speak to them. Maybe because we're nervous, we don't know what to say.

[26 : 49] And obviously, we do want to speak to them. Another problem is that we get in touch, but we're just left. We weep with them, which is good. We pray for them to get out of the situation, but we don't know what else to do.

Well, do you see the value here of Romans 5? Think of the things you could say to a friend who is suffering. I'm praying for you that even in the midst of this, you would know the truth of Romans chapter 5, verse 5.

That our hope is secure because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. I'm praying for you today and I'm thanking God for Romans 5, verse 7.

That we know God loves you because Jesus gave his life for you while you were still a sinner. That even though I can't see God's kindness and care right now in what you're going through, I can see his kindness and care for you at the cross.

Could we try that? Could you just try that with somebody today, this week? I'm praying for you that you'll find comfort in Romans 5, verses 1 and 2 this week so that you can keep your eyes fixed on that wonderful truth even though I know you're going through a terrible time.

[28 : 07] And how do you spot a Christian? You should see it in our joy. A joy that's grounded in the God of grace and his promises for our future. A joy that looks ahead to a future nothing can take away so that God can even use suffering now to grow us in our hope as we yearn more deeply for what's to come.

And a joy that's fully assured because our hope is based not on what we do but on what Christ has already done for us in the past. Let's have a moment of quiet to reflect personally on Romans 5.

Gracious God and loving Heavenly Father we thank you that you've given us peace through our Lord Jesus Christ. We praise you that you are a loving promise-keeping God.

A God whose holiness is matched by your compassion. Your love that you would present in history your Son at just the right time and he would give his life for the ungodly so that you could call us who once were your enemies now your friends.

And we thank you for the power of that hope on offer in our lives that in a world where suffering makes us very vulnerable nothing can take away our future with you.

[29 : 24] Amen.