

Sermon Text Romans 5:1–11

- 1** Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
- 2** through whom we also have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we celebrate in hope of the glory of God.
- 3** And not only this, but we also celebrate in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance;
- 4** and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope;
- 5** and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.
- 6** For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.
- 7** For one will hardly die for a righteous person; though perhaps for the good person someone would even dare to die.
- 8** But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
- 9** Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.
- 10** For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.
- 11** And not only this, but we also celebrate in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

The Joy and Peace of Reconciliation
2nd Congregational Church

Daniel Cote
9/29/24

Scripture Reading John 3:16-18
Sermon Text: Romans 5:1-11

Opening

In his memoir and New York Times Best Book of the Year for 2023, *Everything Sad Is Untrue*, Daniel Nayeri recounts the gripping story of why his mother, Sima, became a Christian. She grew up in a devout and prestigious Muslim family. She was a doctor and had wealth and esteem. But eventually she would forsake all of that to follow Jesus. Sima was forced to flee for her life from Iran, eventually settling in the U.S. as a refugee. When people ask her why, she looks them in the eye with the begging hope that they'll hear her, and she says, "Because it's true." "Why else would she believe it?"

Sima believed in Jesus and left behind wealth and status to openly follow Him. To Sima, following Jesus was more valuable than the possessions and accomplishments she had accrued. She gave up seven million dollars in gold coins, thousands of acres of Persian countryside, ten years of education to get a medical degree, her family, and her home, and perhaps even risked her life.

Nayeri says his mother, Sima, would have never left behind all her possessions and social status if she had not truly believed in Jesus. Nayeri writes,

"If you believe it's true, that there is a God and He wants you to believe in Him and He sent His Son to die for you—then it has to take over your life. It has to be worth more than everything else, because heaven's waiting on the other side."ⁱ

In her own country, Sima was treated and lived like a queen and when she came to the US she was a poor refugee. But now she has freedom in Christ and the peace that comes from her knowledge that she is reconciled to God. I believe Nayeri is right; if you truly believe, you need to let Jesus take over your life. But have we? Perhaps you have been a Christian for years, but have you allowed Jesus to take over your life? That is a question we each need to ponder.

Introduction

Paul's letter to the Romans is very theological in nature, but his theology is completely centered on Christ and his words. Paul opens our sermon text by saying that we have been justified before God through faith in Christ, and as a result, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. There is so much in that one verse. Our God is a perfect God. His righteousness, goodness, and morality flow from and are consistent with His nature. God doesn't choose to be good; rather, goodness is His very nature. And so what is good is what is consistent with His nature.

God is morally perfect, but He is at the same time perfectly loving and perfectly just. God is good, He is loving, and He is just. These are among His attributes that we find revealed in the Bible. Since God is Spirit, He does not have any parts, and so He is perfectly good, loving, and just in all circumstances and times. God, by His nature, cannot set aside His justice to indulge His love, so He must always hold to His love and justice in His dealings with His creatures.

Verses 1-2

In breaking this passage down, it is important to gain an understanding of the word *justified*, which is a keyword in the passage. The Greek word *dikaiōsis* (*di-ki-o-sis*) is translated as justified in our passage and means to "acquit" or to be declared righteous. Paul is using a legal term that refers to a favorable verdict in a legal trial. Our sins are exposed by our failure to follow God's moral law. Since God's justice flows from and is consistent with His nature, there must be a penalty for our sins. God cannot just ignore our sins because they are heinous to Him. Throughout our lives, we have accrued a sin debt that we can never pay. We can't keep God's moral code; nothing we can do will remove or pay for our sins.

As one writer put it, "To remedy this deplorable situation, God sent His Son to die for our sins, in our place."ⁱⁱ When we believe in Jesus, God credits us or imputes righteousness to us because Jesus's sacrifice covers our sins. Thus, when we believe, God marks our sin debt paid in full, and in God's eyes, we stand righteous before Him by the blood of Jesus. The result is that we are now at peace with God and can enter the holy of holies because of Jesus' sacrifice.

Our access to the throne room of God comes by faith in Jesus through the extravagant grace that has been lavished on us. The result of our justification is that we are at peace with God, and Paul says we celebrate in the hope of the glory of God. Formerly, before we believed, we were enemies of God because of our sins. But now, through faith in Jesus, our sins have been wiped away, and we will stand before God and bask in His glory for all of eternity. That is a lot to celebrate about.

False Worldly Teaching

Now, an urban myth out there is that all good people go to heaven. There are people who do good things, but there are no people who are perfectly good. "No one is good except God alone," as Jesus tells us in Mark 10:18. Moral perfection is the nature of God, and what is good flows from the moral code God has revealed to us in the Bible. No one is without sin; it takes just one sin to become a sinner. Our good is just not good enough.

The Law of Moses condemned murder, but Jesus raised the bar in Matthew 5:22, saying the one who is even angry with his brother shall be guilty enough to go into fiery Hell. The Law of Moses condemned adultery, but Jesus says in Matthew 5:27-30 that the one who lusts after another shall be guilty enough to be thrown into hell. With Jesus' teaching, we begin to see that all human beings fall short of God's moral perfection. Who among us has not fallen into anger or lust? But thanks be to God that He sent a Savior, because when we rightly consider God's standards of moral perfection, we would all be lost. As we read in Isaiah 64:6, "For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment...." Our good is not good enough, and without Christ we would have no hope of salvation.

Another politically correct urban myth out there is that all paths lead to heaven. As one writer puts it:

There are many who think they can have heaven without having Jesus. They want the glory, but they don't want to be bothered by the cross, much less the One who died there. Many don't want to accept Jesus as the only way of going to heaven and are determined to find another path. But Jesus warns us that no other path exists and that the consequence for rejecting this truth is an eternity in hell. He told us that "whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" ([John 3:36](#)). Faith in Christ is the key to going to heaven.ⁱⁱⁱ

Furthermore, Jesus says in John 14:6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me."

The one who states that all paths lead to heaven is stating a personal opinion, and I have never seen anyone even try to make a case for the truth of that opinion. If there is no evidence for it, it should be discarded. Our faith in Christ is supported and informed by the evidence of history, prophecy, and science. Now, will we believe Jesus, who fulfilled over 50 obvious Messianic prophecies, performed dozens of instantaneous miracles, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven, or will we stake our eternal destiny on unsubstantiated urban myths and personal opinions? The choice seems obvious to me.

To summarize, as believers in Christ, we are at peace with God, we have access to God, and we have the hope of eternal glory in the presence of God. Peace with God gives us comfort that our sins, past, present, and future, have been forgiven by God, and He counts them against us no more. Access to God assures us that we can call upon Him, and He hears us as we walk through the challenges and difficulties of this Earthly life. The hope of eternal glory gives us confidence as we age, with the number of days ahead of us diminishing that we will not be abandoned of the grave and that we will be resurrected into the glory of His presence in a body that will not get sick, age, or die. Please find me a better set of promises. So, I say with the hymnist, I surrender all. All to thee, my blessed Savior, I surrender all.

Who on earth can guarantee you such things? No one. Only an eternal God, by the sacrifice of His Son, can make and keep such exorbitant and wonderful promises to His children. The world promises us many things, but when we place our hope on the things of this world, we are often disappointed.

During my business career, which ended in 2001, I amassed about 500,000 frequent flyer miles on American Airlines. That was only one of the airlines I traveled on, so I had almost a million miles when I left the corporate world. When I started teaching, I had the summers off and decided to take my family to Disney World using my frequent flyer miles. When I started booking flights, most of the summer flights were unavailable or blacked out for other reasons. To use my precious miles to take my family to Disney World, we ended up on a two-stop return flight that flew from Orlando to Miami to Philadelphia to Bradley. We were delayed in Miami due to thunderstorms, which made us late into Philadelphia, where we were again delayed at the gate due to weather. It was a miserable return trip with two young children.

As with so many worldly things, frequent flyer miles often do not live up to our hopes and expectations. But when our God makes promises, we need to pay close attention because those promises will be fulfilled. Please raise your hand if you have experienced answers to prayers, felt the love of God in your life, or have been comforted by God in times of trial? Just as I expected. We can rely upon our God when we seek Him and when we are in need. Thus we place our hope in God, and not in worldly things, because unlike the world, the love of our God will never disappoint us.

Verses 3-5

With that said, the Christian life is not a trouble-free life. In verse 3, Paul says we celebrate in our tribulations, which seems counterintuitive at best. What is Paul talking about here? Why on Earth should we celebrate our challenges and difficulties? Has Paul gone mad because of His great learning as Porcius Festus, the Roman governor of Judea, suggested of Paul? No, I tell you! Paul is right! In my life, I remember learning many things in the midst of difficulty. It was in college, as I prayed to survive kinematics and heat transfer, that I began to trust God. It was as a result of a ski accident at the age of thirty and a soon thereafter near-miss car accident that I started thinking of the fragility of life. Because of job challenges and worries, I began to reach out seriously to God in prayer. It was after a house fire that I felt the love and presence of God in an unmistakable way. It was in difficult and challenging times, beginning in college, when answered prayers showed me the reality of God.

Amy Simpson writes about the struggles of Abraham Lincoln in her blog, saying:

The movie *Lincoln* provides a glimpse into some of the challenges that President Lincoln faced while he was in office. But the level of suffering this leader endured throughout his life is simply astonishing. He was a victim of relentless and tragic sorrow. His mother died when he was 9. His first love died when he was a young man. Later, three of his four children died in childhood. His wife may have been affected by mental illness, and he himself is believed to have suffered from what we would now call clinical depression.

His political path was no easier. This man we view as a unifying hero was largely unpopular in his own times. The media portrayed him as a hapless hick from the backwoods. Eastern society rejected him and his wife because they were from Illinois—then considered the rough western frontier. And when he ran for president, leaders in Southern states made clear that if Lincoln were elected, the country would divide. With 82 percent voter turnout in 1860, he won with less than 40 percent of the popular vote.

Rather than shrink from a leadership nightmare in the making, [Lincoln] accepted [the] leadership of a country that was already deeply divided below the surface, knowing his election meant division would soon be obvious on the surface as well. Sure enough, after his election, Southern states made good on their threats and began seceding from the union before he even took office. Then, roughly a month after he took office, all-out civil war erupted. His popularity grew during his presidency until, four years after he took office and just six days after the Confederate surrender, he was shot and killed in a final tragedy that helped to bring the nation back together in their grief.

What made Lincoln such an effective leader during this great crisis? Here's one theory: Lincoln's intimate acquaintance with sorrow and hardship had prepared him for the kind of self-sacrifice his presidency would require.^{iv}

We should rejoice in our suffering and tribulation because they set off a chain reaction that ends in hope that does not disappoint us. The sequence is this. Tribulation brings about perseverance. And perseverance brings about proven character, and finally proven character results in hope. Hope is defined as confident expectancy. Our hope in God and His Son is well placed because the Father and the Son are our only hope. Our hope does not arise in us but from God.

By ourselves, we can have no hope because one day, we will go the way of all flesh and will return to dust. But our God is eternal and all-powerful, and our hope in Him is genuine hope for peace and joy in this life and for eternal glory in His presence. Paul notes in verse 5 of our text that, as Christians, we experience the love of God because when we believed the Holy Spirit was given to us, we are now indwelt by the Holy Spirit. God is in us. It does not matter

who or what is against us. We can be sure that no matter what happens to this earthly body, we will one day be reborn into a resurrection body like that of our Lord and will spend eternity in the presence of God.

Verse 6-10

Paul explains in verse 6 God's timing was perfect. After the time of Israel's exile to Babylon, they returned to their homeland of Israel full of zeal for the Lord and to rebuild their temple and nation. Less than 500 years later, the Jewish religious leadership had descended into the legalism of the Pharisees and Sadducees, which was devoid of love of God. At that time, the Messiah dropped into human history, and it was just at the right time for a new godless era was in full swing. It was just the right time for Jesus to come on the scene to die for the ungodly. Someone might die in defense of a good man, but Paul's point is that Jesus came to die for sinners. Christ demonstrated His love willingly, taking on human flesh to die for sinners. How many here would take the place of a murderer in the electric chair? No one. Humans will not lay down their lives for evil people, yet that is what Christ did for us. The perfect Son of God died for sinners.

We might think by now that it is wonderful that Jesus died for sinners, but that doesn't really capture the full story of what God has done for us. The full story is this: as we read in verse 10 of our text. Before we trusted Jesus for our salvation, we were enemies of God. Before we trusted Jesus, we just lived our lives according to our own understanding and by the seat of our pants. We relied on our own intuition and our worldly ways. We were part of the godless world system, and the Apostle John informs us in 1 John 5:19 "that the whole world lies in *the power of the evil one,*" who is Satan. Therefore, we were enemies of God, and it is in the fallen, broken mess of our lives that Jesus saves us. Jesus didn't wait for us to reform our lives to save us. Jesus didn't wait for us to get our lives together before He got involved in our lives. Jesus didn't lay out a path for us to work our way to God like the other false religions of the world.

According to Hinduism, humans are God but labor in ignorance of their divinity because they have forgotten that they are divine. True Hindus must reverence their 330 million gods and protect cows. Salvation is achieved by a revolving wheel of life, death, and reincarnation, through which Hindus will come to know that they are truly divine. According to Buddhism, salvation is achieved by doing many things, such as eliminating greed, hatred, and ignorance from the Buddhist's life by following the Noble Eightfold Path of the Buddha. According to Islam, salvation all depends on the individual and is achieved when an individual's good deeds outweigh the bad. All other world religions require individuals to do the right things to achieve salvation. None of those religions have proof that their claims are true, but there is compelling evidence that Christianity is true.

Where other religions say do, do, do, Christianity says it is done. Other religions say work for your salvation. Christianity says we can't save ourselves; only God can save us. And so, Jesus entered this fallen, broken, sinful world, and purchased salvation for all who believe in His death, and resurrection. In our familiar Scripture reading from John 3:16-18, which we should all have memorized, Jesus declares that God so loved the world that He sent His only Son that whoever believes in Him will not perish. Jesus came on a mission to bring peace and reconciliation between God and man, and no one who repents of their sins and believes in the death and resurrection of Jesus is beyond His reach. Perhaps there are some listening to this message that have not trusted Jesus or are questioning their salvation and eternal destiny. Tomorrow is not guaranteed to anyone. Don't let another waking moment go by before you repent and place your faith in Jesus Christ.

I will close with this. There once was a king who announced a painting contest. He was building a new palace, and he wanted the main entrance hall to be decorated with a large work of art. The king envisioned his kingdom as a peaceful land, so whoever's painting best

symbolized peace would win a large cash prize. The painters got busy and produced many commendable works of art. The king selected two paintings as finalists and put them on display for public viewing.

The first painting was of a majestic lake, so tranquil and still that the lush hills behind it were perfectly mirrored in its reflection. The sky was a brilliant blue with soft, puffy clouds floating above. Wildflowers bursting with color outlined the lake, and a family of deer calmly grazed in a far meadow. All who saw it felt peace and happiness.

The second painting portrayed a tall mountain cliff, rugged and strong. A few small trees grew out of the cracks of the face of the cliff, with gnarled roots clinging for life. A foamy waterfall angrily crashed down the cliff and into the rocky land below. Above, dark ominous clouds loomed, and in the distance lightning flashed. Halfway up the cliff grew a small bush. In its branches, a bird sat in a nest apparently warming her eggs.

After several weeks, the king declared the second painting the winner. Confused and upset, the people asked the king to explain his decision. He said, "Peace is not the absence of conflict. Peace is a state of mind. Those who experience peace have love in their hearts even when turmoil surrounds them."

So too, as Christians in this troubled world, we know that we are at peace with God, for we are no longer His enemies, for by the blood of Christ, we have been reconciled to Him, and we no longer need to fear. Like Sima, Daniel Nayeri's mother who gave up everything for Christ, we have freedom in Christ and the peace that comes from our knowledge that we are reconciled to God. It remains for each of us to let Jesus take over our lives. Remember that heaven is waiting on the other side. Amen.

ⁱ Nayeri, Daniel. *Everything Sad Is Untrue: (a true story)* (pp. 195-197). Levine Querido. Kindle Edition.

ⁱⁱ Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald Barclay Allen, and H. Wayne House, [*Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary*](#) (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1999), 1432.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.gotquestions.org/going-to-heaven.html>

^{iv} Amy Simpson, "There's Power in Showing Your Scars," Amy Simpson blog (4-29-13)