

Romans 4:13-5:11 – Justification by Faith

Introduction

A few weeks ago, we celebrated the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ over the Easter weekend. These things are at the heart of the Christian faith. Without Christ there would be no Christianity. Without his death there would be no salvation and no Gospel – no Good News. Without his resurrection our faith would be a mere whistling in the dark, it would be in vain.

Paul sums up the central importance of these truths when he writes in the last verse of Romans 4 that Jesus "was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Romans 4:25).

This morning I want to look at the great doctrine of "Justification by Faith." I want to look at the foundations for our faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and what it means to be justified by such faith. I want then to look at the blessings that are ours because we are justified by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The faith that justifies

In the verses we read from Romans 4, Paul says that Abraham was justified by faith. Let's look more closely at the passage so that we understand what Paul means.

God had promised Abraham that he would have a son and heir and that through his offspring God would bring blessing to all nations on earth.

Now it has to be said that Abraham's faith was not always rock solid. Since he and Sarah had no children, Abraham suggested that perhaps his servant could be his heir. But God said, 'No', it would be his own child. As the years went past and still no child had arrived, Sarah persuaded Abraham to sleep with her servant, Hagar, so that she could bear a surrogate child to Abraham. The child, Ishmael, was born but God again said, 'No', this was not to be the heir. God would give Abraham a son who would be born to Sarah.

Abraham was about 100 years old and Sarah in her 90s when she at last bore Abraham the promised child. Abraham had at last trusted in God to fulfil his promise. He believed in "the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not" (4:17). He believed that God could give life to their bodies which, as far as childbearing was concerned, were as good as dead. He believed in the Creator God who called things into being from nothing at the dawn of creation and could now, by the power of his word, create a new life in Sarah's ancient womb. This was the faith that justified Abraham before God. This faith justified *God* for it declared that God is righteous and will do what he has promised. And this faith justified Abraham for he was declared righteous by God – owned by God as his child, heir of the promise.

And this, says Paul, is our faith also. We also believe in "the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not". We believe that God gave life, resurrection life, to the dead body of the Lord Jesus. This is the faith by which we are justified. A faith that acknowledges our own powerlessness – that we are as good as dead when it comes to living a life pleasing to God, but a faith which trusts in the power of God – we can trust him completely and absolutely to do what he has promised. So it was with Abraham; so it is with us.

Our faith rests in Christ and in the God who raised him from the dead. We trust in the one who "was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (4:25).

He "was delivered over to death for our sins." He gave himself willingly to die upon the cross as a perfect atoning sacrifice for our sins. Our sin was laid on him and he bore its penalty to the full so that there is now no more condemnation for us when we are found trusting in the Lord Jesus.

My sin, Oh the bliss of this glorious thought!
my sin, not in part, but the whole,
is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more;
praise the Lord, praise the Lord, Oh my soul!

He "was raised to life for our justification." When Jesus hung dying on the cross he cried out, "It is finished." His resurrection from the dead is the Father's seal upon his dying work, his affirmation that it is indeed finished. The Father is saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter now into the joy of your Lord." God justified him – declared him to be his Son, the righteous one, accepted and embraced by the Father.

How can we be sure that Jesus had done enough to secure our forgiveness and acceptance with the Father, enough to bring us safe to glory? We can be sure because God raised him from the dead, welcomed him back into glory and seated him at His right hand. God has accepted him and he accepts us through faith in him – we are justified by faith, a faith which recognises our weakness but also God's power:

Nothing in my hands I bring
Simply to thy cross I cling

This is the faith that justifies – that makes us right with God. It is simple trust in Jesus our Saviour who died for us and who was raised from the dead for us: "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification"

The blessings that flow from being justified by faith

But Paul's concern in Romans 5 – at least in the first half of that chapter (in the verses we read) – is to underline the blessings that flow to us from the crucified and risen Saviour – the blessings of being justified by faith.

"Therefore", says Paul, "since we have been justified by faith, we have..." Well what do we have?

Peace with God

The first of the blessings mentioned by Paul is "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Did you see the pictures on Friday of Kim Jong-un of North Korea and Moon Jae-in of South Korea smiling at each other and shaking hands with each other and declaring that the state of war that has existed between the two countries since before 1953 was at an end? We sincerely hope that this is more than a show for a watching world and that this peace will prove to be a lasting reality.

In verse 10 of Romans 5 Paul says that we were once God's enemies. We might think that this is a bit strong but what it means is that we were intent on going our own way rather than submitting to God's rule. We were objects of God's wrath (see verse 9) – God had declared war on our rebellion. But Jesus has dealt with our sin and willfulness. He has put an end to the warfare between us and God and has declared peace. God has come to embrace us in the Lord Jesus and to acknowledge us as family – we have been reconciled to God through the work of Christ our mediator. God invites us to live within his embrace. This means not only to enjoy peace with him but also to live at peace with one another, as Jewish and Gentile Christians were reconciled to one another in the first century. We are called to live under the reign of the Lord Jesus, the prince of peace.

What a blessing, to enjoy peace with God; peace of conscience, no more guilt and shame. Enjoy this blessing of peace with God.

Access into God's presence

Secondly Paul says, "we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand" (5:2) and this also is through Christ.

What is this access of which Paul speaks? First of all, perhaps, it is access into God's presence. Perhaps Paul was thinking about the temple in Jerusalem which had been so central to the old covenant. Jews has access into the courts of the temple while Gentiles did not. Jewish men could go a little further into areas where women could not go. Priests could go into areas where other Jewish men could not go. But no-one could go into the holy of holies, the most holy place where, symbolically, God dwelt except the High Priest and that only on the Day of Atonement when he approached with the blood of sacrifice.

But when Jesus died upon the cross, the veil in the temple was torn from top to bottom. It was as if God could no longer be confined within the holy of holies but had burst out so that all could have access into his presence. By the grace of God we have access into his presence through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Only by grace can we enter,
Only by grace can we stand...

We need to enjoy this peace which Christ has secured for us and make good use of the access we have into his holy presence, being found there often with thanksgiving and our prayers for ourselves and others. We have access to God and to all the treasures of his grace in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The hope of glory

Thirdly Paul says that "we boast in the hope of the glory of God" (5:2).

What is this "hope of glory"? It is not just the hope of one day seeing God in all his glory and the glory of the risen Christ – though it is that; it is the hope also of sharing in that glory (see Romans 8:17). Can you imagine that? Paul says in Romans 8:18, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." And he goes on to say that all creation is waiting with "eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed" (8:19).

One day, when Christ returns, we will share in his glory and be made like him in his resurrection life. In that day, all creation will be transformed to reflect his glory.

This is our hope. It is more than wishful thinking for it is guaranteed by the promise of God and the resurrection of Christ. It is ours not because we deserve it or can ever deserve it but is Christ's love gift to us which we receive simply with the empty hand of faith.

Christ has promised to bring us safe to glory. Do you believe it? If I asked you this morning, "Are you certain of your place in glory with Christ?", how would you answer?

Listen to Paul's argument in verses 9-11:

Since we have now 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.

Do you understand Paul's argument? If God loved you so much that when you were far off from him and a rebel against him he sent his Son into the world to die for you, you can be sure that he will not now abandon you. Now that we are his purchased possession he will see to it that we are brought safe to glory. The Saviour who went to the cross for us was raised again for us and has gone to glory to prepare a place for us.

No matter what trials and difficulties we may face on the way, he will bring us safe to glory. We have this hope that nothing can destroy. We can rejoice in hope of the glory of God. We can be a people marked by joy even when surrounded by all manner of trials and misfortunes.

Is this a picture of you? Does the hope of glory fill you with joy and peace in believing?

The gift of the Holy Spirit

Then in verse 5 Paul writes, "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."

Christ gives the Holy Spirit to those who come to trust in him. But how is the Holy Spirit's presence in the heart proof that the hope we have of glory will not disappoint us?

The Holy Spirit assures us that God loves us and that we are his. The Spirit enables and prompts us to cry, "Abba, Father."

Paul elsewhere says that God "has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come" (2 Corinthians 5:5 cf. Ephesians 1:13-14). Older versions used the word "earnest" rather than deposit.

The picture is taken from commerce in the ancient world. I might go to the market and agree to buy a number of sacks of grain. To secure the grain I would pay a deposit and attach my seal to the purchased sacks. Later I would return with the balance and pick up what I had purchased.

Paul says that God has given us the Spirit as a seal or mark that we are his. We are his purchased possession and he will not abandon us but will come back to claim us as his own. The Spirit then is God's gift to us to assure us that we are his.

The Spirit also gives us a foretaste of the glory to come. He gives us a sense of God's love for us and a glimpse of all that shall be ours when we are taken to be with Christ in glory.

Count your blessings

So these are just a few of the blessings that stream to us from faith in the crucified and risen Saviour:

- Peace with God – knowing that our sins are forgiven and there is no more condemnation for us;
- Access into God's presence – we can enjoy fellowship with God who welcomes and embraces us as his children;
- The hope of glory – the knowledge that Christ has gone to prepare a place for us in glory and will bring us safely there;
- The gift of the Spirit, assuring us we are children of God and giving us a foretaste of all that is yet to come.

Are you trusting in Christ today – trusting him for salvation now and glory to come? If not, why not when all these blessings can freely be yours – and not on loan, they are yours to keep for all eternity.

We who have come to trust in Christ need to appreciate daily what Christ has done for us and will yet do for us. We need to count our blessings, name them one by one. Rejoice in God's goodness whatever trials may come your way. Prove the sufficiency of his grace. Look for and long for the day of his coming when all that we have enjoyed of his blessings thus far will seem small things compared to the greater glory that will be revealed in us.

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