

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, June 12, 2011
Pentecost Sunday**

**THE BENEFITS OF GRACE:
THE HOPE OF THE GLORY OF GOD**

Romans 5:1-5

INTRODUCTION TO SCRIPTURE READING

We turn again today to the opening verses of Romans 5, where Paul outlines for us the benefits or blessings of having been justified – declared not guilty – in the sight of God by the grace of God through the saving work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who demonstrated the love of God by giving His life for us on the cross to redeem us from our sins and to reconcile us to God. We have looked at these verses so many times that by now you may have them memorized. Or almost. This is a good thing. I encourage you to commit these verses to memory so that you will never forget the rich blessings which have been given to you through the grace of God. Memorizing these verses will also enrich you by helping you, as Paul prayed in Ephesians 3, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep the love of Christ for you really is, to really know the extraordinary nature of His love, even though it is beyond our capacity to know it completely, so that you may be filled full with all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:18-19). So I urge you to memorize these verses and give thanks often for the benefits of justification which are yours through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Reading Romans 5:1-5, let's give our full and reverent attention to God's holy Word.

A BRIEF REVIEW

So far, as we have been digging into these verses in Romans 5, we have found that, since we have been justified through faith in Jesus and His saving work on our behalf:

1. We have peace with God (5:1). Peace with God is not something you can achieve, no matter how hard you try. You can't buy it, no matter how much money you have. It is a gift of God's grace, which comes free of charge to people who don't deserve it, and never will. The only way to have this peace is to receive it as a gift – to accept it by faith in the sin-forgiving, guilt-cleansing, saving and life-changing grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. Graceland is not just a place you can visit in Memphis. Grace-land is where we live. As God's children and Christ's followers, we now live in the land of grace, and we have the privilege of unlimited, unrestricted access to the throne of grace (Romans 5:2; Hebrews 4:16) – the throne of *God* – which we may approach not with a spirit of anxiousness or fear, but with confidence to receive the mercy and grace we need for any situation. Anytime. Anywhere. God's grace is available to us 24/7. Grace-land is our home.

BENEFIT NUMBER THREE: THE HOPE OF THE GLORY OF GOD

Benefit number three, says Paul in verse 2, is hope. Not just any old hope, but “the hope of the glory of God.” And, he says, “we rejoice in (this) hope.” This hope, which is a gift of God’s grace, is intended to be a continuous source of joy in our lives. And it is, unless we allow the circumstances of life to steal it from us.

Let’s think a bit about hope. The dictionary defines it as “the feeling that what is wanted can be had or that events will turn out for the best” (Dictionary.com). It is “a feeling of desire for something and confidence in the possibility of its fulfillment” (World English Dictionary). Used as a verb, it means “to look forward to (something) with desire and reasonable confidence” (Dictionary.com). Here is an example: “I hope many of you will come to the Church Picnic today.” And: “I hope you will enjoy the program presented by our Next Generation Worship Arts Kids, and have a terrific time of fellowship with one another at the picnic.”

Sometimes, though, our expressions of hope are little more than wishful thinking, or maybe desires, whose fulfillment is uncertain at best. In this regard we might say:

- “I sure hope it doesn’t rain today.”
- “I hope I win the lottery.” (Which will never happen, because I don’t play the lottery.)
- “I hope the price of gas goes down below \$3 a gallon – and stays there.”
- “I hope there is an NFL season this year.”
- “I hope I get a new BMW for Christmas.”

You get the idea. That is not the kind of hope Paul is talking about.

Jerome Groopman is a physician and professor at Harvard Medical School. He is the author of the book *How Doctors Think* (2007) and an earlier book entitled *The Anatomy of Hope: How People Prevail in the Face of Illness* (2004). When diagnosing patients with serious illnesses, Dr. Groopman discovered that they are all looking for a sense of genuine hope, and that hope is as important to them as anything he might prescribe as a physician. That gives you a sense of how valuable hope really is. Groopman defines hope as “the ability to see a path to the future. You are facing dire circumstances, and you need to know everything that is blocking or threatening you. And then you see a path, or a potential path, to get where you want to be. Once you see that, there is a tremendous emotional uplift that occurs” (From preachingtoday.com, “Doctor Describes the Healing Power of Hope”).

The Bible, of course, has a lot to say about hope. The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah called upon God as the “Hope of Israel, its Savior in times of distress” (Jeremiah 14:8). David praised God as “the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas” (Psalm 65:5). In Romans 15:13, where Paul affirmed that God is “the God of hope,” he asked God to fill the believers in Rome (and us by extension) “with all joy and peace as (we) trust in Him, so that (we) may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Overflow with hope in the God of hope! Lord, let it be so.

In Lamentations 3, written after the conquest of the kingdom of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B. C., Jeremiah expressed the grief and sorrow in his soul over the suffering and loss and affliction of his people. But then, in the middle of his lament, he said:

Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:
Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed,
For His compassions never fail.
They are new every morning;
Great is Your faithfulness.
The Lord is good to those whose hope is in Him,
To those who seek Him.
(Lamentations 3:21-23, 25)

Isaiah declared that though “youths grow tired and weary” (which seems to be true especially when you ask them to do almost anything involving work ☺), “and young men stumble and fall, those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength” (Isaiah 40:30-31). Those who put their hope in God, those whose hope is in Him, find that “He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak” (40:29).

David is so bold as to say in Psalm 25 that “no one whose hope is in (the Lord) will ever be put to shame” (25:3), which is true because of the unfailing love and sovereign grace and mercy of God our Savior. In Isaiah 49, the Lord Himself says: “Those who hope in me will not be disappointed” (49:23). This does not mean that you and I will never experience disappointment in this life. It does not mean that we will never face difficulties or encounter obstacles or suffer setbacks in the course of this life. What it means is that if we put our hope in God, if we trust in Him, in His sovereign power and grace and wisdom and love, to keep His word and carry out His promises, we will not be disappointed in the outcome. We will be blessed. I have a feeling that when we get to heaven and see God face to face in the fullness of His glory, we are going to be in for some surprises – happy surprises – way beyond anything these little minds of ours can imagine. And no one whose hope is in God our heavenly Father, no one who trusts in Jesus Christ the Son of God for salvation, no one who has experienced the indwelling presence, fullness, equipping and power of God the Holy Spirit for life and ministry, will be disappointed when we see how it all turns out. In fact, far from being disappointed, I think we will be so overwhelmed with joy in our hearts and gratitude to God that we will find ourselves, in the words of Charles Wesley, “lost in wonder, love, and praise.”

Are you with me?

In the New Testament, Matthew points to Jesus and says that “in His name the nations will put their hope” (Matthew 12:21), fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy of the messianic “servant of the Lord” to come (Isaiah 42:1-4). Paul gives this testimony in 1 Timothy 4:9-10: “This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance ... that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe.” In his letter to Titus, as we saw several weeks ago, Paul says that “having been justified by His grace” – that is, declared righteous in the sight of God on the basis of Christ's righteousness credited to us

– “we (have) become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying” (Titus 3:7-8a). You bet it is.

Elsewhere, in Colossians 1:23, Paul speaks of “the hope held out in the gospel,” which is the promise not only of forgiveness of sins and peace with God here and now, but the confident assurance and expectation of eternal life in heaven with God Himself and all His redeemed people. Moments later, in verse 27, Paul alludes to “the glorious riches of this mystery” – the astonishing plan and gracious provision of God for our salvation in Christ, a mystery made known to the world in the message of the gospel – “which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” The fact that the Lord Jesus Christ has given us new life and has come to live in us through the Holy Spirit gives us the joyful, confident expectation that we will see and celebrate the full revelation of the glory of God in heaven. This is “the hope of the glory of God” in which we rejoice.

Then there is Peter. Peter’s joy in what God had done and the hope which is ours in Christ was so great he couldn’t keep it in. It is almost the first thing out of his mouth in 1 Peter 1. He says: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – an inheritance kept in heaven for you, who are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials” (1:3-6).

Through the Lord Jesus Christ and His saving work for us – through His incarnation, sinless life, vicarious suffering, atoning death, and bodily resurrection from the dead – we have a living hope for the future. We have a living hope in a risen, living Savior.

Then Peter continues: “Though you have not seen (Jesus) [with your own eyes], you love Him. Though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him, and you rejoice with a joy that is inexpressible and full of glory, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1:8-9).

Don’t miss what Peter is saying here. Because of Jesus, we have a living hope that energizes and inspires us to love and follow Him. This is a reason to rejoice. Through the saving work of Jesus, we have an inheritance awaiting us in heaven. This is a reason to rejoice. We have a sovereign and gracious God who watches over us and protects us, even in times of trouble or suffering. This is a reason to rejoice. We have an unseen Savior who is at work in us to refine us and strengthen our faith, and we can be confident that He will finish the good work He has begun in us. This, too, is a reason to rejoice.

The Bible is a hope-full book. It is totally realistic in its assessment of our human condition, but it is full of hope from the first page to the last. The gospel is a hope-full message. It is a message of hope for sinful human beings who know there is no hope for our salvation, except in the sovereign mercy and grace of God. The church is a hope-full fellowship of pilgrims called to walk by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7), to not only hold firmly to the hope we profess but to rejoice in it (Hebrews 10:23; Romans 5:2), and to do everything in love (1 Corinthians

16:14). The church is meant not only to be a place of grace. It is meant to be a place of hope, too. It is meant to be a place where true, lasting hope is found

As members of God's family and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are people of hope. But it is a particular kind of hope. It is hope *in* God. It is hope in *God*. It is hope in the saving power of Jesus Christ. It is hope in the fulfillment of God's promises. It is the hope of the glory of God to be revealed on the day the Lord Jesus returns from heaven and makes all things right. It is the hope of seeing God in the fullness of His glory and greatness in heaven – not because heaven is what any of us deserves, because it is not, but because of God's amazing grace, which is given free of charge to people who don't deserve it and never will. Like you and me. This is a hope that will not disappoint us.

This hope in God is a course of lasting joy. This hope of sharing in the glory of God is a reason to rejoice.

GOT HOPE?

Do you have hope today? Is your hope in God and the saving work of the Lord Jesus on the cross for you? If not, if your hope is in someone or something else, if your hope is in anyone or anything else, you will be disappointed in the end. Put your hope in God and God alone.

If you belong to the Lord Jesus by faith and He belongs to you, rejoice. If you have been justified by His grace, rejoice in the hope that is yours. Rejoice in the Lord always. Since Paul said it again in his letter to the Philippians (4:4), I'll say it again, too: Rejoice! When the highway of your life is smooth, rejoice. When the road is bumpy or you have to take a detour, rejoice. And hold on to your hope in the Lord your God. Because you need Him. I need Him. Everybody needs Him. Without Him, we have no hope. That may not be what our secular culture proclaims or what people want to hear today, but it is true. And it will never stop being true.

A pastor got a phone call from a young dad who said: "Last night my child died." What do you say, what *can* you say, to someone who has just lost a child? As a parent, it is hard to imagine anything more heart-wrenching or painful. I don't know everything the pastor said to this grieving father, but he said something good for us all to remember. He shared these words from an old, familiar hymn:

When darkness veils His lovely face,
I rest on His unchanging grace.
When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay.
(Edward Mote)

May the Lord our God be your hope and stay always. And may you rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Lord, let it be so in us. Amen.