

Rejoicing Through Suffering

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: 03 June 2018

Preacher: Ali Sewell

[0 : 00] Well, as Billy said and read, we're going to be looking through those first 11 verses of Romans chapter 5. If you have a Bible with you, it would be great to have them open in front of you as we continue.

As you guys continue through this incredible letter which you've been looking through, written by the apostle Paul to a young church, to a church going through very real situations through a church with very real challenges and in the light of this, Paul writes to this church to lay out the foundation of the gospel.

What is Christianity really all about? The beginning of chapter 5 that we are looking at this morning actually marks the beginning of a new section in this letter, really.

Paul has spent the first four chapters giving kind of the facts as it were. He's laying out what has happened, what is done, what is gone. And then hammering home, as Billy mentioned, hammering home the fact that justification and really that just means being kind of declared righteous, being made right with God, that this justification only comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

It's only through faith in what He has done. We cannot stand before God based on how good we are, based on our background, based on kind of the type of person we are, but only by trusting in Jesus.

[1 : 28] And it's if and it's when we do that, that His perfect life, His perfect righteousness is credited to us and our sin, the mess that we make of life, all the things that we do wrong, it is paid for by Him, paid for at the cross, where Jesus dies in our place.

This is what has happened. This is what Jesus has done, Paul has been saying. The only way to be saved is by faith in Him. And really that's kind of chapters one to four of Romans.

There's a lot more in there. I'm sure that Derek has been sharing with you, but hopefully that at least is familiar with you if you've been here on Sunday mornings over the last couple of months.

If you're just visiting this morning, hopefully that kind of brings you up to speed to Romans chapter five that we're going to be looking at now. So mainly having been looking back in chapters one to four, chapter five and onwards, Paul is going to start looking a lot more at what are the kind of the present and the future implications or consequences of this gospel of justification by faith that he's laid out.

And it says we move into this section. I think it's a really helpful reminder to us that actually Romans isn't just some kind of theological textbook. It's not just a list of facts about God, but it is a real letter and it's a real letter to real people.

[2 : 53] And actually Paul expects these facts that he's laid out to make a real impact, to make a real change, to make a real difference to people's lives, to people back in the first century in Rome and also to us here today in Edinburgh.

And so let's look at these and you're really pleased to know that actually the first outcome that he's going to focus on in these verses is rejoicing. It's as if Paul's kind of been saying, well, thank you for sticking with me through these opening chapters.

We've covered quite a lot. Some has been quite hard to hear, some has been quite close to the bone, some has been quite tough to grasp. But now it is time to smile. Now it is time to celebrate. And so hopefully to some degree that is what we're going to be doing this morning. Christians are supposed to be people who rejoice. If the Bible is true, if what Paul has been saying so far in Romans is true, then it gives us a greater reason to be joyful than anything else that the world can offer.

Now a restored relationship with God, not based on our efforts, but achieved on our behalf because of his great love for us. What amazing news.

[4 : 03] That is the gospel. That is the good news of the Bible. Christians don't always have a particularly great reputation as being rejoicing people. Perhaps especially the Scottish Presbyterian variety, which isn't always synonymous with joyful exuberance, we could probably say.

But here Paul is going to encourage us to rejoice. And he's also going to show us why we can rejoice and that we can rejoice in all circumstances, even in the hardest of times.

So just one quick caveat or clarification before we dive into these verses. If you're not feeling that upbeat this morning, if you didn't rejoice your way into church, that is fine.

Please don't switch off. Please don't think, oh, these are just going to get me down even more these verses. This rejoicing does not mean being happy clappy all the time. It's not putting on a fake smile and saying that everything's great and isn't life always wonderful.

We'll see as we work through these verses that these are realistic about the struggles of life, realistic about our challenges, about our weaknesses. And yet Paul says that accepting the gospel and really grasping that does bring joy, does bring a deep cause for celebration which nothing can shake.

[5 : 23] And so the flow of this passage and the way we're going to follow it through is really firstly the foundation of that rejoicing and then how we can rejoice even in suffering and then thirdly, finally, how we can rejoice with real certainty.

So that's the flow of these verses and that's what we're going to follow through. So first up the foundation. The primary cause of this rejoicing is what? Well it is this justification by faith that Paul has been teaching so clearly in chapters one to four.

Have a look at these opening verses one and two. Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, as Billy said, therefore since we have been justified by faith, everything is going to flow out of that justification by faith.

Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

In these two verses Paul is kind of linking that the past and the present and the future of the Christian life showing that everything is based on. Everything begins with this foundation of justification.

[6 : 38] Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, past tense, it is done, it has happened. Everything and the Christian life builds from that. That is why Paul has been laying out so clearly in chapters one to four.

That is why every Sunday we kind of remind ourselves of that. We are not ashamed to say, we have done justification by faith. Can we not move on? Because everything builds from here.

It is so easy for us to get out the wrong way round. Our natural inclination I think is that justification is kind of the finish line. Maybe if I do this and this, if I try really hard, well then I will reach this position of being justified, of being right with God, of God being pleased with me.

Paul is emphasizing here again as he has been for the whole of the first four chapters that the justification is the start line. It is the foundation from which everything flows in the Christian life, putting our faith in Jesus.

How then does in this particular case, how does rejoicing flow from this justification? Paul builds this kind of chain I suppose, having established the past tense, that foundation.

[7 : 49] He says this justification affects our present situation in two ways. Number one, we have peace with God. We have peace with God. Paul, if you have been here, you will remember Paul in chapter one, spoke at length about kind of God's anger at sin.

Touches on it in chapter two and three as well that God is rightly angry at all the stuff that is wrong with the world, all the injustice that we see. He also then points kind of the finger at us, you know actually we are part of that.

We all have done things wrong. We've all fallen short. We deserve that anger to be directed at us. And yet through Jesus, through the cross, through him taking that anger, we have peace with God right now.

And because of our justification that hostility is over, there is a real objective change in our relationship with God. There is peace where there had once been war.

And so that's the first change in our present situation, peace with God, but it goes beyond that. Secondly, still in verse two, we have access into his grace.

[8 : 54] It's easy I think when we think about peace to kind of think, well we're not at war anymore, I'm not at kind of hostility anymore, that's done. Let's just forget about it and we'll kind of go our own way. I know that's how I would tend to deal with tricky relationships.

You know, I've spoken to that person, it's fine, we'll just never speak to each other again. You know, that's kind of our definition of peace so often. There's no kind of healing, there's no relationship. But that is what we see here, that through this justification we now have access. We now have a relationship. We stand in God's grace. The whole of our lives is lived in this undeserved love that God has for us.

And so this justification Paul is saying does not just remove the problem that was between us, but it builds and sustains a lasting relationship with God.

That even when we mess up, which we will, even when we fall short again, which we will, we don't move back to this, that peace doesn't end. But we continue to stand in this grace.

[9 : 54] We continue to remain in God's love. We continue in that relationship. And so there's that kind of chain. The past event is our justification. The present reality is our ongoing peace and relationship with God.

And then at the end of verse three, Paul looks forward as we have this relationship now, we look forward in anticipation to sharing in the glory of God in the future.

And that is where our hope lies. Not in the here and now. This is not as good as it gets. But we look forward to that perfect future. That is where our hope is.

And this word hope, when we find it in the Bible, is not. That's something vague. It's not how we would often use hope. You know, I hope the weather is going to be nice this afternoon. It's not wishful thinking.

But a biblical hope is a certain hope. It's something that will happen. Something that we can look forward to. Something that we can stake our lives on.

[10 : 53] So that is why, and that is why this kind of chain finishes with rejoicing in this hope. We rejoice in looking ahead to what's in store. We rejoice in the prospect of sharing in God's glory.

And so that's what this passage is all about. It is rejoicing. It is a justification through faith in Jesus, which is the foundation of that rejoicing. And through this chain of peace and relationship and hope, we rejoice in the glory that is to come.

Now, you may well be here this morning. Perhaps you've been here for the last few weeks looking through Romans. Perhaps not. Perhaps you're not really convinced whether even this foundation, this justification is true.

Perhaps you're not really convinced whether what the Bible says is true. It's so easy, I think, and so many people have the impression that actually Christianity is a little bit kind of stuffy.

Christianity is actually about kind of following rules. Christianity is something that sucks the fun out of life, really. And you know, I'm not here to deny that there are Christians that have not represented Christianity well.

[12 : 00] And yet, what is important is what the Bible teaches us about Christianity. If you're here this morning and you're kind of weighing up the claims of the Bible, it's so important that you grasp what the Bible is actually offering.

And here it is. It is not a code to live by. It's not about ascending to certain facts, but it is an invitation into a joyful life in relationship with God.

It is an invitation into this relationship with being able to look forward to even more to come at a certain hope, sharing in God's glory forever.

The gospel is a message which, if it is true and if you accept it, should bring joy and not squash it out of us. Christians are not immune to kind of hard times and struggle.

But again, this is such a helpful reminder that when we are down, when we feel that life is on top of us, actually we see it. God wants us to remember our justification, remember what God has done, but not just stop there.

[13 : 02] He wants us to look to the cross, but not stop there, but to remember the difference that that makes now, the difference it makes today, but always pushing us forward to that certain hope in which we rejoice, the eternal difference that that makes.

And that is how, as Christians, we're able to rejoice, looking ahead to that glory, that hope of glory of God and rejoicing in that. So there we go, that's really the foundation.

The justification by faith leads to rejoicing, particularly rejoicing in that hope which is to come, that hope of sharing in God's glory. But we might well think it and you might well be sitting there this morning.

Well, that's very easy to say, isn't it? But what about me? What about my situation? What about the week I've just had? What about the week I've just got coming up?

Life is difficult, we have struggles, we go through hard times, we are tired. It's all well looking forward to this hope, but what about today? Well, I think we continue.

[14:05] We see that Paul has the audacity in verse three to go on by saying, not only that, not only do we rejoice in this hope, but we rejoice in our sufferings.

That's the second thing I want to look at this morning, that through the gospel we're able to rejoice in suffering. We're able to rejoice right now, rejoice in all the stuff that we're going through.

Again one of the great things about the Bible is that it is not unrealistic. Paul is not unrealistic about the world that we live in, that the hardships it contains, he knew those better than anyone.

And yet he says this rejoicing can continue even in suffering. Last Saturday night I was watching the Champions League final, I was a fairly neutral observer as Preston Northend had again failed to get very far in the competition.

But at the end, as with most major sporting events, there was great celebration, there was rejoicing, there were fireworks, there was great joy. And yet at the same time you have those incredible pictures of people celebrating in the background but in the foreground, kind of full-on players lying on the floor, grown men crying, massive disappointment, dreams shattered.

[15:19] And you have these two kind of butted right up one against the other and this certainly isn't me saying there is anything wrong with being disappointed in things or upset about things. But I just thought that picture was a great kind of picture of how we often think about joy, about rejoicing, about celebration.

That it is purely a product of our circumstance. So if things go well, if we're in a good place, if we're on kind of the winning side at whatever moment, then we're happy we celebrate.

And yet if things haven't gone the way we wanted them to go, there is despair, there is despondency. How could we possibly have joy when things aren't going the way we want?

The idea of rejoicing when things don't go well is so often alien to us. And yet it's incredible here that Paul says that the Gospel breaks the mold.

The Gospel reshapes our whole attitude toward joy and rejoicing. We rejoice, Paul says, even in our suffering. How is that possible?

[16:19] How can Paul say that? Well, he can say that because of that foundation that he's laid down, because it is based on the fact of justification, that that past event, that nothing can change or shake.

And so that means for us, even as our circumstances change, even when we are struggling, even when things happen to us which are rubbish, things come in that we could have never expected and kind of knock us for six.

But even then, Paul says, we're able to rejoice in our sufferings because our justification, our peace and relationship with God, the certain hope of glory that we have cannot be taken away.

Now, our joy is not based on day-to-day circumstances which can and which will change, but it is based on our eternal past, present and future as defined by the Gospel which never changes.

And so that doesn't mean, as we said earlier, that does not mean pretending everything is fine. That does not mean rejoicing, it pretends that we're always loving life, that we have no struggles.

[17:24] But it does mean that in these struggles we can rejoice because we are certain of God's love for us. So often religion can kind of put suffering as almost a form of punishment from God.

If I've done something wrong, well, God is giving me what I deserve. If I'm suffering, well, how do I know God really likes me? Maybe I've fallen out of his favor.

And yet Paul has just said the very opposite. Paul has built that foundation that through justification we stand in grace. The whole point of grace is that God doesn't give us what we deserve.

He is far kinder to us than that. Times of suffering are not a punishment from God, but they are times which Paul says God uses to grow us.

And like any training, it's difficult at the time. And like any training, if we don't see the point of it, if we can't imagine there being any end result to it, we get dispondent, we give up. And yet if we know that it is growing us, if we know it's being used, if we know it develops us, then we can joyfully go

through it, even though it's challenging.

[18 : 30] And Paul here wants us to know that in suffering we grow. In suffering, God is using that. How does that growth happen? Well, he lays it out. Suffering produces endurance, teaching us to persevere, to keep focused on God and what's important.

Endurance produces character, he says. A character is that idea of really testedness, of knowing that our faith is genuine, that it doesn't just kind of blow around with the wind.

And character produces hope. And we've already talked about how this hope is certain, this hope is kind of objectively going to happen. Well, how can it increase?

Well, really it's our experience of that hope that this suffering builds. It is that yearning for what's eternal and solid and perfect and still to come that is strengthened.

And so we're able to rejoice in our suffering, not because we enjoy it, but because God is using it to drive us even more to the very reason that we do rejoice. We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

[19 : 38] And our experience and grasp of that hope deepens as we're brought face to face with the suffering and difficulties which we face here and now. But suffering and difficulties which will have no place when we share in that glory.

If a lot of people, the whole existence of suffering leads them to doubt the idea of a God, especially the idea of a loving God. And perhaps, you know, that's something that's on your mind this morning. If there really was a God who is powerful and loving, well, why does all this bad stuff happen?

Perhaps that's a kind of an academic question for you. Perhaps that's a very real emotional question for you.

Perhaps you're a Christian and you're going through really hard times and you can feel it wearing you down. You can feel it's a struggle to rejoice. And yet Paul wants to be really straight up about suffering.

The Bible speaks about suffering a lot. It's not surprised or ashamed of suffering. It doesn't say if you suffer, something's gone wrong. It says we live in a broken world and things aren't the perfect creation that God has made.

[20 : 43] But it says that the gospel transforms our understanding of suffering. That in the gospel we see the ultimate example of God taking what is bad and using it for what is good.

That in suffering is not pointless, but that there is a purpose. That God is not punishing us. God is not leaving us. But God is growing us, preparing us all the more for the eternity that we'll spend with him.

And so we're able to rejoice in our suffering. That does not mean, I want to say this again, that does not mean that it is easy. And that does not mean that we kind of laugh at suffering off. It does not mean that people so easily say and please never say this.

It does not mean that one day you'll look back and it will all make sense. Or one day you'll look back and laugh. We might never understand it. We might never look back and laugh.

It might be painful for all of our days here on earth. And yet the truth is, if we accept what Paul has said about justification by faith, then we have this promise that even in hard times, God is at work.

[21 : 51] Even as we go through that, he's teaching us even more to put our faith, to put our hope in that perfect future which is to come, that perfect future which we have a place in, not because of what's happening to us here and now, not because of how we live or what we've done but because of what Jesus has done through the gospel.

And so again, even in times of suffering, we're able to rejoice. And so let's move on. And this basically so far, this justification by faith in Jesus leads to rejoicing in a certain hope.

This rejoicing is not bound by our circumstances, which means we can rejoice even when times are hard and God will use those hard times to increase our hope, to increase our joy.

Well Paul finishes in the last half of these verses, kind of answering the question, well how can we be certain of this? It takes a lot of trust to rejoice in a future hope.

It takes a lot of trust to put all our security there instead of wanting everything here and now. How do we know Paul is going to kind of answer this question? How do we know that we'll even make it to this glory that we've put our hope in?

[23 : 06] How do we know, Paul says in verse five, that this hope won't put us to shame, that this hope won't let us down? Well as Paul kind of works through the second half of these verses, he gives us two grounds for certainty, two things we can rely on, two proofs really, one looking back and one looking forward.

Now first looking back we see the depth of God's love for us. Have a look at verses six down to eight, for while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

For one will scarcely die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die. But God shows his love for us in this, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Paul again is pointing back to the cross. We know the reality of God's love for us, because even when we were dead against him, even when we wanted nothing to do with him, he was willing to die for us.

Paul says you might hear and we do hear incredible stories of sacrificial generosity, of people risking their lives to save friends or to save innocent people, and yet when Paul points us to the cross it goes far beyond even that.

[24 : 29] Even though humanity as a whole really had spat in God's face, wanted nothing to do with him, still he paid the greatest price possible in order to rescue us.

Still he paid that price to make peace, to bring us into a relationship and to give us this certain hope for the future. So Paul says if you're unsure about this, if you're still struggling, look back and see the extent of God's love and the certainty that that brings.

And then secondly really his second kind of proof is looking forward, looking forward to see the certainty that we will be saved, the certainty that we will enter this future hope, that we will share in this future glory.

And again Paul really gives us the evidence here, the logical argument I suppose in verse 10. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his son, much more now that we are reconciled shall we be saved by his life.

God did all this for us while we were his enemies and God did all this for us while it cost him the death of his son. Paul says now that we're at peace with God, now that we're reconciled to him and have this relationship and now that that cost has already been paid, well of course God is not going to stop now.

[25 : 54] God is going to make certain that now as his people that he will continue to guide us and lead us and ensure that we reach that glory that we hope in. If he did that for us while we were not his people, if he did that for us while it cost him his son on the cross, how much more now that we are his people, how much more that Jesus has died but lives again.

So Paul pulls this section together and I want us to close really with this thought, pulls this section together by saying do not be afraid to hope in this glory which is to come.

Don't be put off hoping in what is ahead because things are difficult at the moment. Don't be put off hoping in what is ahead because it seems too good to be true. Don't be put off hoping in what is still to come because God might change his mind, he might not see you through to the end.

We can be certain of this hope because of what God has already done, because of that justification he's already achieved. And there is certainty in the future because of that foundation laid in the past, that foundation which gives us that relationship, that reconciliation here in the present.

And the last verse there, what is the result of all of this? What is the result of this certainty that Paul proves? Well verse 11, we rejoice. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have now received reconciliation.

[27 : 25] We rejoice. Christians go through hard times, Christians don't have to pretend that everything is fine. If you are considering Christianity, if you're considering whether that's for you or it is not a free pass through life, avoiding any kind of difficulties.

And yet the great news of the Gospel is that Christians can truly rejoice in all circumstances because of what God has done. Christians can rejoice in their suffering because God works through it.

Christians can rejoice with certainty because God will bring us home into that glory. Let me finish with this great quote from the American pastor Tim Keller speaking about the joy of Christianity. He says this, joy is the great marker of the justified person. It is unique to Christianity because it does not depend on your circumstances or your performance.

We can look forward with cast iron certainty to our home in glory. Let me pray.

[28 : 33] Heavenly Father, we thank You for the truth of the Gospel. We thank You for the facts of our justification by faith in Jesus Christ. We thank You that it is not down to us.

It is not down to our efforts, but it is down to You and what You have done. And Lord, we thank You that that is done. That is accomplished. That is finished. And we thank You that from that foundation

we have a relationship with You.

And from that foundation we look forward to a certain hope of eternity sharing in Your glory. And Lord, we thank You that that is reason to rejoice.

Lord, please forgive us for the times when we look away from You. Please forgive us for the times when we look to our day-to-day circumstances, where we look to our own strengths to find reasons for rejoicing.

Please keep turning our eyes and our hearts and our minds back to You and recognize the true certainty that we have. That our rejoicing does not depend on our circumstances or our performance, but instead it depends on looking forward with cast iron certainty to our hope in glory.

[29 : 43] And we thank You that here and now You are preparing us for that home now. Lord, please be with us this week. We pray especially for those who are going through difficult times, especially for those who are suffering, especially for those who in some ways this message, this passage is a difficult pill to take.

Lord, we pray that You would increase in them all the more, that they would trust, even if they cannot see how, that they would trust Your Word, the Bible, that You are working through these difficult times and that You will bring them to glory.

Lord, we ask all of these things in Your name and for Your glory. Amen.