

52 STORIES OF THE BIBLE

by

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45. Christian Joy

Introduction

In chapters 1-4 of Romans, as we saw last week, Paul is dealing with the whole topic of becoming a disciple, specifically the issue of justification. We saw that Paul teaches us that we become righteous only by faith in Jesus Christ. That you and I are declared 'not guilty' of our sins; not because we've worked really hard at it, but because Jesus did the work for us on the cross.

In Romans 5-8, Paul moves into the next topic of being a disciple. We're dealing here primarily with the doctrine of sanctification, the doctrine of holiness, or at least growth toward holiness in our everyday life. In these four wonderful chapters, Paul is going to spell out the benefits of being justified by faith. He's going to show us what the life of a righteous person looks like. I want you to note right up front the order and the connection of things. Look at chapter 5:1 please, 'Therefore, since we have been justified by faith.' Please notice that justification comes first and then sanctification. Chapter three comes before chapter five. It's easy to get the order switched and to think that, 'Well, if I really work hard at sanctification, if I work really hard at holiness, that somehow I'm going to earn favor with God.' That's heresy. Justification by faith, through God's grace to the work of Jesus Christ (chapters 1-4) is what comes first; then based on it, we look at chapters 5-8 and what the Christian life looks like; in other words, what a justified person is enabled to live like. We can never put sanctification before justification. We put what God does first; then on the basis of it and his enablement, we talk about living out our lives in holiness.

Also notice that justification must necessarily lead to sanctification. Chapters 5-8 in Romans are not optional for a Christian, this is what justification leads to. In our statement of faith it talks about sanctification being the necessary and certain fruit of justification. So let's get the order straight right up front. Justification is the basis and upon it, it enables us and calls us to a life of holiness and sanctification.

What I'd like to do is give you the broad sweep of the four chapters. While there are many, many things that Paul is saying that are dear truths, I want to pick out nine; nine things that describe what this life of righteousness is about. I want to, as Paul wants to, overwhelm us with the goodness and the graciousness of God. I want to spur you on to love and to good works by showing you what it looks like to live a fully devoted, righteous disciple's life. The best thing that you can do this afternoon is read Romans 5-8 in light of this sermon.

I. Chapter 5 - Joy of our Reconciliation

A. Looks to the past - Peace with God

In chapter 5, Paul is talking about the joy of our reconciliation. The first point he makes is when he looks back to the past and he says that for those who are righteous, we are at peace with God. Chapter 5:1, 'Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, [and not by works] we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.' In verse 11 he's going to talk about reconciliation; peace and reconciliation mean the same thing. It means that hostilities have ceased between God and us and those hostilities have been replaced by relationship.

I think the key truth when it comes to the Biblical doctrine of peace is that it is an objective reality. It is not primarily subjective, but peace is primarily an objective reality. In other words, it's not so much how you and I feel about God. Peace is how God thinks about us. Those are radically different things. Paul doesn't say, 'Hey, let's work really hard and learn to feel like we're at peace with God.' Rather, because we are justified by faith, we are at peace with God. It is this objective confidence that gives us stability in the midst of our lives, in the emotions and the ups and downs of our circumstances: that when all of this stuff is moving and shaking, what we can know for sure is that because we are justified through faith in the work of Christ on the cross, God looks at us and he says that we are at peace.

Eventually, this objective reality does begin to move us subjectively. As we come to understand that we are at peace with God, it starts to affect our affections and our emotions and our joy, such that even in the midst of difficult circumstances we can still rejoice. For those of us that are righteous because of what Christ did on the cross, we can know with absolute confidence, no matter what the circumstances of life, that we are at peace with the only person that really, really matters; and that is God.

B. Looks to the future - 'rejoice in hope of the glory of God' - 5:2b

Then Paul looks to the future and he continues in verse 2, '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.' The second attribute of a righteous life is that you and I can rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Just like peace, the Christian doctrine of hope is not something that's subjective. When the Bible is talking theologically about hope, it's not like, 'I really hope this happens.' The Biblical doctrine of hope is itself objective. One writer translates hope as 'the confident anticipation of what is to come.' When you and I rejoice in hope of the glory of God, we are rejoicing in the absolute confidence that as we look forward to what lies ahead, we know that we will have the glory of God.

There's nothing uncertain about it because our justification is based on faith and the work of Christ on the cross and not on how many good things I happen to do.

We are looking forward with absolute confidence to receiving the glory of God. What is that? What is the glory of God? On one hand, Paul is talking about the glory that God always intended us to have. He created us to have glory. That glory was lost in the Fall and yet we can know with absolute certainty that when we get to heaven, that our glorification will be complete, Romans 8:30, 'And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. Glorification is in the future. It's why we hope in the glory of God. Yet Paul can speak of our future glorification in a past tense because he knows beyond a shadow of doubt that justification was because of faith; that the glory God intended for us is waiting and we will be glorified.

Someday the pain will be gone. Someday the struggle with sin will be erased. Someday the half-heartedness with which we serve God will be destroyed and we will be exactly who our all-loving, all-powerful, always gracious, all-glorious God intended us to be. Now if that's not worth rejoicing in, I don't know what is. We are rejoicing with confident anticipation that ahead of us lies our complete and total glorification.

The other side of the glory of God is that you and I are also looking forward to seeing the glory of God himself. In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul says; 'Now we see in a mirror dimly but then face to face. Now I know in part, then I shall be known fully.' We can only see the glory of God dimly, as in a mirror. In ancient days mirrors were not what they are

today. They were just a piece of metal you could barely get a reflection out of. In fact, if you go to the museum at Corinth, they'll show you a mirror, and you can barely see who you are in the mirror. We see now in a mirror, but we look forward with confident anticipation to the vision of the glory of God when we get to see him face to face. When I was younger I always thought, (not because I was taught this) of heaven as a terminus. I always thought that heaven was, 'Well, we're going to get there and we're going to be perfect, and that's what it's going to be forever.' I never did like that song we sang, 'When we've been there ten thousand years bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we first begun.' Boring. I get to sit around for 10,000 years and do the same thing over and over again. Well it's not going to be boring to praise God. But for a 10-year old kid it was out of his mind boring. But heaven is not a static place. God will always be infinite and you and I, even when we are perfected, will always be created. We will always be finite. As the thousands of millennia past are replaced by trillions of millennia, you and I are going to continue to grow in our understanding and our awe and our amazement of the glory of God, of his wonder, of his majesty, of his perfections. This is an ongoing process. We will never fully understand him. We will always be growing in love and in amazement and wonder at the glory that our God has. We see him now in a mirror. It's nothing compared to what it's going to be like when we get there, which is nothing compared to what it's going to be like in a couple trillion millennia. We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. In fact, as Paul goes on to say, this hope is so firm and this hope is so glorious, that it is this very hope of glory that carries us through the difficult times in our life. It carries us through the sufferings, and the ups and the downs and the valleys and the shadow of death. In verses 3-5 that's the point he's making, 'More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, [Yeah, right Paul.], knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces 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.' Our hope is so firm and the promise of glory, our glory and God's glory, is so great that we can face suffering with a smile because we know what lies beyond it; that as we go through difficult times, God develops endurance in us; and as God develops endurance, he develops character in us and as he develops character in us, he develops more hope, hope in the glory of God. Those of us who are righteous rejoice in the confident anticipation of the glory that I am going to receive and the glory that I get to see in the face of my God and my Redeemer and it's going to get better every single year.

C. Christ's sacrifice fully covers all our sin

But wait! There's more, a lot more. Paul continues pointing out that Christ's sacrifice fully covers our sin. This is the doctrine of the sufficiency of the cross; and it certainly is an object of hope and joy for us. Paul begins in chapter 5:12 by describing Adam's sin and the effect of Adam's sin on everyone because everyone, like Adam, sinned. He says, 'Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.' So he starts this picture of the devastating effects of worldwide sin.

Then as he goes through the argument he compares Adam's act of sin and its worldwide effect to Christ's act of righteousness and the worldwide effect. In verse 18, 'Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all [people], so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all [people].' Jesus' sacrifice on the cross

is sufficient to cover all the sins of the world. It is impossible for you and your sins and me and my sins to put ourselves outside of the ability of the cross to forgive. That's why as powerful as 'The Passion of the Christ' is, the most powerful part of the passion are the hours that Jesus spent in separation from God, his Father, the first time in all eternity during which time he was made to be sin so that you and I could be made the righteousness of God. His time on the cross, his payment; in a sense, his doing of our sins, his paying the penalty of our sins, is so all-encompassing that no sin of yours and mine can put you outside the ability of God to forgive, if you ask. How can it not be a response but of joy, knowing that God's sacrifice on the cross covers all that I could ever do? The sufficiency of the cross.

II. Chapter 6 - Sanctification

In chapter 6 Paul moves into the specific topic of sanctification. He's talking about the issue of: is it okay for someone who claims to be a Christian, someone who claims to be righteous, is it okay for that person to live in sin? He's not talking about the occasional sins that we confess and we are forgiven (1 John 1:9). He's talking about ongoing sin; where sin is a characteristic of our life. And he says, 'Is that okay? Is it okay to live in sin if we are sanctified?' And the answer in chapter 6 is 'No. No it is not.'

A. We have been set free from sin.

Paul begins in chapter 6 by saying, 'We've been set free from sin. Why would you want to live in it? That doesn't make any sense.' It's like Paul is scratching his head and he says, 'This is the silliest question I've ever been asked. Should we continue in sin that grace can abound? What a silly question. You have died to your sin. You have been set free from sin. Why would you choose to live in it?' He uses a very powerful image of baptism, and in chapter 6:3 he says, 'Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.' What Paul is saying is, 'Look back at the time of your conversion and what happened in your conversion. Look back at the time of your baptism and what did the baptism symbolize? What were you saying to the people when you were baptized? That just as Christ died, just as you were buried with him in that death, just as you go under the baptismal waters, you are dying with Christ. That's what happened in your conversion; and you have died to that old kind of life. Just as Christ was raised to a new kind of life and just as you were brought out of the baptismal waters, so you also have been raised to a new kind of life; a kind of life where you have died to sin, where you have been set free from sin. Why would you think you would even want to live in sin?' We have been freed from its tyrannical power, verse 7, 'For one who has died has been set free from sin.' What a joy. What a joy to live this kind of life, knowing we have been set free from the absolute tyrannical power of sin. Sin still affects us, doesn't it? Sin isn't eradicated. It's not going to be eradicated until the final judgment seat, so you and I still have to deal with sin. For example, you have verses 11 and 12, 'So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.' In other words, you need to understand that you have died to sin. You need to understand that you are now alive to Christ. What does that mean? Let not sin, therefore, reign in your mortal bodies to make you obey their passions. Sanctification is still something that we cooperate with God in doing. We are

called to not let sin reign in our bodies, enabled by the Spirit. But, we have been set free from the sin that's always nipping at our heels. We were freed from the absolute tyrannical power of sin; such that we don't have to sin anymore. We've been set free from sin. What a life of joy.

B. Slaves of righteousness

Then he continues in the second half of chapter 6 that we have also become slaves of righteousness. He's just trying to say the same thing, but with different metaphors. And he says that before our conversion we were slaves to sin. We had no choice. We were going to sin. That's what 5:12 is all about. We were caught in a web of deceit and a web of lies; and this slavery to sin was leading us to impurity, to ever increasing wickedness and ultimately, Paul says, to death. But now that we are righteous we have become slaves of righteousness. Look at 6:22, 'But now that you have been set free from sin [the first part of chapter 6] and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.' He uses the metaphor of slaves of righteousness earlier in the paragraph. See, the result is freedom from sin: It's holiness. It's eternal life, and it's the joy of servitude, the joy of servitude to the God of the heavens and the earth, the joy of servitude to the God of the cross. That's where there is freedom and that's where there is joy.

During prayer time this morning someone prayed that we so often think of a life of righteousness as something that's burdensome. We often think of the Christian life as, 'Okay, all I've got now is a whole new set of things that I have to do and that I can't do.' We think of a life of righteousness as burdensome. But is it not true; and sometimes we don't always see it in ourselves, but we can see it in other people so clearly, that there is nothing more burdensome than being enslaved to sin. There is nothing more burdensome than being caught in this downward spiral that sin wants us in, where it drags us further and further and further until it completely and totally destroys us. That's burdensome. But a life lived in servitude to God, of joy and of righteousness, is the only freedom there is in all of reality. And so joyfully we thank God that we are slaves of righteousness.

Notice what Paul does not say, by the way, in chapter 6. When the question is asked, 'Is it okay to live in constant sin as a believer?' He doesn't say, 'Yes.' I mean his answer is, 'No. It's not okay for a believer to live in constant sin.' There are people that will teach that the Christian life really doesn't matter. That sanctification is optional. 'Hey, you've been justified by your faith. You can live anyway you want. You've made that profession of faith. You raised that hand. You joined the church. Hey, you can live anyway you want. You've been justified by your faith.' Sanctification is the necessary and certain fruit of justification. That's the teaching of Paul. But justification always leads, always leads to sanctification. Chapter 6 is not optional. It is the chapter of joy and of freedom. But it's not optional. The mind set on the things of the flesh is death, Paul is going to say. But the mind set on the things of the Spirit is life and peace.

III. Chapter 7 - Freedom

Chapter 7 then is a talk about freedom. The point he wants to make is that the righteous person is free, specifically from the condemnation of the law. There is so much more, as I've said, to the Christian life than simply accepting a new list of do's and don'ts. There is so much more to the Christian life than the condemning finger that says, 'You can't

do that anymore. Become a Christian and no more fun for you!' Yet it is remarkable how many people shut themselves up to this kind of miserable existence, who don't understand the freedom and the joy there is in Jesus Christ, and it is nothing but law. It is nothing but a new set of rules that we have to follow. That's what Paul is addressing in chapter 7, so point six of the nine is that we are free. The whole message in chapter 7 is best summed up in the first two verses in chapter 8 where Paul says, 'There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.'

As you read through chapter 7 you'll see Paul's argument start to unfurl and he says that just as a person who loses a spouse to death is free to remarry, so also believers have died to the law, they died to the 'Thou shalt not'; and if you continue the imagery out, we are all married to Christ. We are his bride, collectively. We are individually married to him. Chapter 7:4, Paul says, 'Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.' We're free from the law. We have died to the law. We are married to Christ so that we can bear fruit (not live anyway we want) but to bear fruit for God.

There are still rules. We must not act like an adulteress. Chapter 7:6, 'But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.' There are still guidelines. There are still guidelines towards holiness. And there's still struggle.

Paul says the same thing at the end of chapter 7 that he does in chapter 6, that the full force of sin has not been eradicated. It's still around, in fact, and it's a controversial passage. But I think what Paul is saying is, 'As I look at my own life, as a very mature Christian, I still understand that sin is a power at work in me; and the things that I want to do, I don't do; and the very things that I don't want to do, I end up doing.' As anyone grows in their relationship to Jesus and as their sanctification gets deeper and deeper, does not our sin become more and more clear and apparent to us? Almost in a sense, separated from us so that we can see that yes, sin is still at work in my life. So there are still guidelines. There is still a struggle, but the absolute tyrannical power of sin has been destroyed and Jesus is with us, so that in the midst of the struggle, the ever-increasing victorious struggle of our lives, we can still cry out as Paul does in verse 24, 'Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?' Do you ever feel like that? Do you ever feel like, 'I just can't take this any longer. I am a wretch of a person'?

IV. Chapter 8 - Holy Spirit

In Chapter 8 Paul is moving in a crescendo to what it's like to live life in and by and with the power of the Holy Spirit, and there are so many things that he talks about in chapter 8; but let me just point out three that are not necessarily more important, but they're three of my favorites.

A. Adopted into the family of God - 8:23b

Paul talks about the fact that through the power of the Holy Spirit, you and I are adopted into the family of God. Look at verse 23 please, 'And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, [we've been given the beginning of the harvest, we know what heaven is going to taste like, we know what a relationship

with God kind of tastes like. He's our firstfruits. He's our guarantee of what is to come] groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons [and as daughters].' The adoption process has started. You and I who are righteous by the work of Christ will know with absolute certainty that we have become God's children. Yet we all wait for that final court date when the adoption process is finalized. We don't just wait for it, we groan in anticipation. We look forward with such excitement that we groan. Are you so excited about your future with God that words cannot express your joy? Are your words simply inadequate to describe the deepest visceral feelings that we have as we groan because we cannot wait for that final day when our adoption process is finalized? If any of you have adopted children, you know exactly what I'm talking about. We are adopted into the family of God.

B. The Holy Spirit assures us that we are God's children

The Holy Spirit assures us that we are God's children. We know what's going to happen, but in the process God is assuring us that we are, in fact, his children. Turn back please to chapter 8:14 and Paul writes, 'For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, Abba! Father!' The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.' There is absolutely no question in my mind where I'm going to go when I die. There is absolutely no question because there's absolutely no question that I am a child of God. And while there are many things that we can look at when we talk about assurance of salvation, certainly the greatest is the fact that I hear God's Spirit say to me, 'Bill, you are a child of the King.' That is certainly the strongest assurance, the kind of assurance that nothing can affect, because no one can separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus. And my assurance will stay true because I hear the voice of the Spirit, of my Savior, telling me that I am his child. Yet it is interesting that even within such a marvelous context of that, Paul feels the need to warn us, as he's been warning us all the way through chapters 5-8. Look how verse 17 concludes, '[We're] heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.' That's the problem of preaching to people's felt needs, because nobody feels their deepest and truest needs; and one of our deepest and our truest needs is that we must suffer for Christ. If you want to be glorified with him, (that's heaven) then you and I must suffer. 'Now, this is a doctrine of salvation by suffering and anyone who is miserable enough in life automatically goes to heaven.' No! This is not salvation by suffering. By suffering, Paul is not thinking exclusively of martyrdom, although that might be the case for some of you. Some of your children may be called from this body; you may be called from this body, to serve the children who live in sewers in Budapest, and you may die there for your faith. That might be what God has called you to or me to. But Paul, by suffering means more than just martyrdom. I think he means the same thing that he's talking to Timothy about in 2 Timothy 3:12 when he says that 'everyone who seeks to live a godly life in Jesus Christ will be persecuted.' Conflict with this world is not a sign that something is wrong. Conflict with this world is often a sign that something is right. Jesus said that if they hated me they're going to hate you. If you and I live out our lives in this world, and there is no conflict; if nobody knows that you're a Christian, if nobody knows that heaven is your true home, if nobody knows that you are in the light and they are in the dark, then I would start to

worry if I were you. But what Paul is saying is that if you and I are living out our Christian commitment we will come in conflict with this world. There will be problems. You will not be the most popular person on the block or school or at work because you will be standing in implicit condemnation of society that is going to hell in a hand basket; a society that very quickly is going to be defining marriage as multiple relationships with animals. It's right around the corner. And if you and I can live in that kind of cesspool, then there's something wrong with you and there's something wrong with me. But rather we live out our lives committed to our Christ, lives of righteousness; and we will come in conflict with the world. And we will suffer; and the suffering is a sign that our commitment to Christ is real and it is that kind of suffering through which we go to heaven to be glorified. Please understand, it is in the midst of conflict that God speaks the loudest and the most clearly, is it not? It is when we need his grace the most that it comes through the most clearly. We are God's children.

C. If that isn't enough, Paul concludes that we know God is on our side

Paul goes through chapter 8 with many, many more things, but he concludes on this point. It's kind of as if all this, all these blessings, all this joy is not sufficient. Paul concludes by saying that God is on our side. What more is there than God being on our side? Romans 8:31, 'What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? [Who really gives a rip who's against us, God is for us] He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him [with Jesus] graciously give us all things?' There's no-one of any consequence who is going to oppose you and me if God has already given his Son, there's nothing left.

But then he continues, there's no one who can charge us with sin, 'Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?' Who is going to be the accuser at the judgment seat, Satan? No. Satan is not our accuser at the judgment seat. It is God who justifies. I have been declared righteous, not because of who I am or what I have done, but because of who Jesus is and what he has done. There is no-one left to charge me with sin.

There is no one who will condemn us, verse 34: 'Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died more than that, who was raised who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.' There's no-one left to condemn us. Christ died for us. He's forever before the Father interceding. He stands between God, the Father, and you.

There's no one left to condemn.

Then he says there is no one who will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Verse 35, 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? [Or anything else I can think of.] Verse 37: 'No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.' And then he ends with verses 38 and 39: 'For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

This is the joy of the righteous life. Are you overwhelmed? You should be. I trust that Romans 5-8 will encourage you to see what your life can be, what your life should be. My prayer is that it stir you up to love and to good works, confident and joyful in our hope, free from the power and free from the condemnation of sin, enslaved to God, led by God's Spirit. That is true life; that is abundant life.