



## Since We Have Been Justified

### Grace Reigns: God's Gospel for All Peoples Series #31

Romans 5:1-5

David Sunday

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Father, we thank You for the gospel that You reveal in Your Word. We are not ashamed of Your gospel, God. It is the power that You have sent for salvation to everyone who believes. Everyone from all the nations, Jews and Gentiles, can be counted righteous in Your sight—not through works that we have done, but through the work of Your Son on the cross. We pray that You would help us learn to live in the good of that gospel as we look into Your powerful Word together. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Today we're coming back to the great letter of Romans. We've been going back and forth between Genesis and Romans over the last year or so. Last summer we were in Romans 1-4, which ended with Abraham and his life of faith. Then in Genesis last fall, looked at the life of Abraham and now we're returning to Romans, chapter five, which is building upon this truth of justification—how God declares sinners righteous when we come empty-handed to Him, receiving His Son Jesus, and saying, "We have nothing to give except our sin, and we need righteousness from You." God declares us righteous by faith, which is called justification.

Now in Romans 5-8 we're going to learn how to live in the good of this gospel and in the fullness of the grace God has given us in Christ and through His Spirit. We'll begin reading at Romans 5:1;

*<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>2</sup> Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup> More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup> and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup> 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.*

This is God's Word. We thank Him for it and rejoice in it.

Back on December 26, 1944, a second lieutenant in the Japanese army by the name of Hiroo Onoda was sent to the Philippine island of Lubang. His mission was to resist the American advance and his orders were to fight on indefinitely. Later, World War II ended, but everyone forgot to tell Onoda that the war was over. So he remained in the jungles of Lubang, fighting on indefinitely. Years went by. He'd come out at night, steal food from villagers, firing random shots here and there.

Finally, the Japanese tried to get Onoda to stop fighting. They made a newspaper article saying, "Onoda, the war is over." They sent leaflets down into the jungle. They spoke to him over loud speakers, trying to convince him that hostilities had ceased. They even had his own brother try over the loud speaker—but Hiroo didn't believe him. As a last ditch effort in the 70s, they sent his former commanding officer, a man by the name of Major Taniguchi, who ordered Onoda to surrender. Then he gave up—finally. For about 30 years, he fought a war that had ceased.

God is saying to us in Romans 5:1 that the war is over. We have been justified by faith. If we've trusted in Jesus Christ, the hostilities have ceased. You see, sin brings hostility. It brings warfare. When we give ourselves over to sin, what we're saying is, "God, I want to be in charge of my own life. I am in charge." God says, "No. I am in charge of your life." So there's an on-going war here.

In justification, God does everything necessary to end that war and to cease hostilities. We have been justified by faith. This is something that has taken place in the past. If we've trusted in Jesus, a declaration has been made by God the Judge that our sins are forgiven for the sake of Christ and what He has done on the cross.

An old theologian, William Shedd, describes it so well:

Justification is an instantaneous and complete work of God. It is an all-comprehending act of God. All the sins of a believer—past, present and future—are pardoned with the believer justified. The sum total of his sin, all of which is before the divine eye at the instant when God pronounces him a justified person, is blotted out or covered over by one act of God. Consequently there is no repetition in the divine mind in the act of justification, just as there is no repetition of the atoning death of Christ upon which our justification rests.

That's a lot to take in, but it's wonderful news. God has done something in Christ to cancel the guilt of every sinner who trusts in Him—past, present and future. There's nothing we can do to add to that work that Jesus has done on the cross, and there's nothing we can do to take

away from it. Justification is secure for those who believe in Christ. It has nothing to do with what we've done; it has everything to do with what Jesus has done on the cross.

Some people hear this terminology of justification as a legal act, as a courtroom type of transaction, where the judge declares the sinner "not guilty" because the Advocate, Jesus, has stepped in and said, "I have paid for his sins in full"—which is a wonderful legal transaction. But people think that seems kind of cold and sterile legal-courtroom language. What impact does this truth of justification have on my life? That's what Paul is moving toward in this portion of Romans. He wants us to know that what God thinks of us in Christ should matter greatly in comforting us in how we live today.

You care a great deal about what your significant others think of you. Isn't that a big thing on Valentine's Day? "He loves me; he loves me not." What does that special someone think of me? We're thinking about that today. But what God thinks of you in Christ is that He accepts you because the guilt of your sins has been covered by the righteousness of Christ. He has freed you from bondage to sin through the power of Jesus in your life. Paul says this truth of what God thinks of you in Christ should make all the difference in the world regarding how you live.

So let's talk about living in the good of our justification now—in the present. Paul wants us to see two things. Since this has happened in the past—since we have already been justified by faith—now in the present there are two wonderful implications of this truth that ought to be shaping our lives every day.

### **We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Paul's not talking here about subjective peace. He's not talking about inner serenity or the peace of God. That's something we also have when we cast our burdens and anxieties on Him. God doesn't give us inner, subjective peace.

But here he's talking about objective peace: a status that has changed, a war that has ended. He's saying to us believers, "The war is over. We have peace with God." Whether you feel happy or secure it does not change this objective reality: that God was rightly angry with you because of your sin and, there was nothing you could do about it. But Jesus has done it all, and when you believe on Him, God says, "You have peace with Me now. The war is over."

That's great news. We could not make peace with God. How do we know that from verse one? What is the key clause or phrase that makes crystal clear that this peace with God was not something we could achieve? Do you see it at the end of verse one? "...[T]hrough our Lord Jesus Christ." In every significant section in Romans 5-8, Paul ends with these words: "...through our Lord Jesus Christ." You see it again in verse 11, and as you work your way through Romans 5-8,

you'll keep seeing that. In Colossians 1:20, Paul talks about Jesus making peace through the blood of His cross. Jesus made this peace for us.

So think about the different ways people talk about being at peace with God. Back in the olden days, it wasn't uncommon to read in someone's obituary something like this: "Having made her peace with God, Gertrude entered into her heavenly home." There's just a whole lot wrong with that way of speaking because we do not make our peace with God.

Some people go to the mountains and watch the stars at night—the serenity of nature—and feel that all is well. They say, "I think to myself, what a wonderful world," and they feel so good, like they are "one with the universe." They think, "I'm at peace with God" because of that. That's not what Paul is talking about.

Other people live really wretched lives, making a mess of things through their actions, then they say, "I'm going to turn over a new leaf. I'm going to clean myself up. I'm going to become a good father...a good mother. I'm going to start going to church and sing the hymns. I'm even going to stay awake during the sermons. I'm really going to become religious! I'm at peace with God. I've made my peace." Paul says, "No way. That's not peace with God."

Other people—and maybe this is more our temptation—say, "Yes, I'm at peace with God. I read my Bible. I pray. I have a wonderful sense of His love in my life. My prayer times have been marvelous. My spiritual disciplines have been regular. I have victory over my sins. I'm at peace with God." What's the problem with that? It's all about me, me, me, me, me, as if my peace with God depends on what I have done. It dishonors what Christ has done on the cross.

Our peace with God is through our Lord Jesus Christ, through His cross, and only through His cross. So it's an objective peace. We can't do this on our own terms. But peace with God is an objective status that should affect us subjectively. I mean, isn't this what so many of our hymns are about? "Arise, my soul, arise. Shake off your guilty fears." Why? Because "the bleeding sacrifice on my behalf appears. Before the throne my surety stands. My name is written on His hands."

I dare not dishonor the work of Christ on the cross by acting as if my peace with God depends on me. I need to shake off those guilty fears. Christians who are always morbidly anxious and despondent over their own spiritual condition often are not magnifying the work of Christ on their behalf and resting in what He has done for them. He made peace with God.

I think of another hymn that makes me want to dance whenever we sing it. "Now why this fear and unbelief? Has not the Father put to grief His spotless Son for us? And will the righteous Judge of men condemn me for that death of sin, now canceled at the cross?" Why should I be full of fear when Jesus' precious blood has ransomed me? Why? We have peace with

God through our Lord Jesus Christ. That's objective. That's our status now. The war is over. Stop fighting.

Secondly, living in the good of the gospel now means through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand. The words "obtained access" mean to bring near, to introduce. If you want to meet the President of the United States, you don't just go knocking on his door. You don't have his number, I assume, in your iPhone. You need someone to introduce you. You need someone who can give you access into the Oval Office.

I think of Queen Esther, who was even part of King Xerxes' harem, but she couldn't just stroll into the presence of the king. When her uncle Mordecai came to her and said, "God has raised you up for such a time as this, to bring deliverance to the Jews," she was trembling at the thought of entering into the royal presence of the Persian king. She fasted and prayed for three days before she dared enter. She put on her most beautiful robes and came in great humility, looking for one thing: will he extend the royal scepter and say, "Draw near"? If he didn't extend that scepter, the gallows would have been prepared for Esther. [See the Old Testament book of Esther for the whole story.]

We, Paul says, have obtained access. We can come into the holy presence of the King as His royal sons and daughters. You see, justification isn't something sterile. It's not merely about a judge declaring you "not guilty." It's also about a Father opening the way to His fatherly heart and saying, "I want you close to Me. I want you to have access to Me. I want you to know My Son Jesus, Friend of sinners. I want us to have a personal relationship."

Tim Keller says it well: "In Christ we are ushered into the royal throne room, and we stand there, we remain there. Wherever we go in the world, we are always in the heavenly throne room." Isn't that good news? We're standing there. Paul says in Ephesians 2:6 that we are seated in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. We're always in the mind of God. Our names are written on His hands and on His heart. We're the apple of His eye (Psalm 17:7), His sons and daughters. We're princes and princesses of the King. We have access by faith in Jesus into this grace in which we stand (Romans 5:2).

I saw an illustration that I think is helpful. The human race is not divided by floors. You know, the good, holy people—the Mother Teresas of the world—live on the top floor. Then the really wicked people—the Hitlers and Stalins—they're way down low. Most of us are somewhere in the middle—not really great, not really bad—and we wonder, how do we get close to God? We think of it like a stairway or ladder.

That's not the gospel. The gospel says the human race is divided by one door. Jesus is the door. Whoever enters through Him has freedom in the presence of God. He is the Way, the

Truth and the Life (John 14:6). So no matter who you are or what you've done, if you've come near to God through Jesus, you are now in a whole new realm. You now live in a whole new world—in the realm of grace. Grace now reigns in your life. God treats you, not as your sins deserve, but as Christ deserves.

He treats you as if you are not guilty of any sin and completely righteous in the Beloved. He receives you as an heir of His grace. Grace reigns over your life. You cannot escape that. No matter what you do or think or feel, you live in a position of privileged acceptance by God. You stand in grace now. When God justifies you, He puts His whole heart into it. He's saying, "I want you to know. I want you to be close to Me. You can come to Me at any time. You have access into My presence."

Because of the past, verse one, "*...we have been justified by faith...*" Now in the present "*...we have peace with God*" (also verse one) and we "*have access by faith into this grace in which we stand...*" (verse two). That's the present. Then Paul moves toward the future at the end of verse two, "*...and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*" We're rejoicing in the present because we have a hope-filled future. Hope is not a mere wish—it's a certainty. We have a certain assurance that we are going to experience the glory of God!

Isn't that what we celebrated yesterday in Ed's funeral service? He beholds the glory of God. He rejoiced in hope of that glory, and there was a wide smile on his face here because he knew where he was heading. He rejoiced in hope of the glory of God.

Now, this theme of glory is important in Romans, so look back at Romans 1:23. We see there that we made a terrible exchange when we sinned. We forfeited God's glory. Romans 1:22: "*Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.*" So we lost God's glory. We exchanged it. We forfeited it.

Yet we're still longing for it. We're still seeking it. Romans 2:7: "*To those who by patience in well-doing seek for...*" What? For "*...glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.*" This is the inner dynamic of a believer's life: we are seeking for glory and honor and immortality. What did C.S. Lewis say? "If I find in my heart a longing for something this world cannot satisfy, it means I must have been made for another world." We've got this longing for glory and honor and immortality, and we can't find it in this world because we're made for another world.

Paul says this longing is going to be satisfied, but it's not going to be satisfied in ourselves because we all lack it. Romans 3:23: "*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" Sin makes it impossible for us to reach what we long for: God's glory. Then Paul wants us to

know that one day believers in Christ will fully share it. Romans 8:18: *“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”* Every suffering will be more than amply compensated with the glory that will be revealed to us.

So what is Paul saying in Romans 5:2? We rejoice in hope of that glory today! We've been freed from our past; we are now free in the present to live at peace with God and to have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, knowing that God is always gracious toward us. And we're looking forward to God's glory in the future. Someone might say, “Yeah, I get that when I'm feeling good. But what about when I'm feeling bad? What about when my circumstances are a mess?”

Paul wants us to see that we can still rejoice in the worst of times. Look at verse three: *“More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings...”* We don't rejoice at our sufferings like masochists, but we rejoice in our sufferings. Why? Because God is at work to make those sufferings productive in our lives. What do sufferings produce? Verse three, *“...knowing that suffering produces endurance...”*—perseverance. It's a single-minded focus that enables us to keep going under pressure.

Believers, have you experienced this when you go through great suffering? Have you found that it refines your focus and frees you from distractions? Has it helped you realign your priorities and enabled you to persevere toward the goal of being with Christ? Suffering has that kind of refining work in our lives.

And then this perseverance, this endurance, brings about proven character (verse three). It's the kind of character that can only be proven through a test, what Tim Keller calls “a poise.” There are qualities you will never experience until you're tested. You've got to go through the test in order to get to the next place. That's why a lot of people think the Chicago Cubs are going to do great this year. Because they came so close to getting to the playoffs and the World Series this past year, they'll be able to get there because they've been tested.

You see, God tests us and proves our character through it. I love this statement by Catherine Marshall. I've put it on a sticky note in front of my desk and look at it often. “God's way of dealing with us is to throw us into situations that are over our depth and then supply us with the necessary ability to swim.” That's where some of you are right now—in over your heads. Tested. But God's going to supply you with the necessary ability to swim. He's building character.

Then what does that tested character produce? It produces hope. I thought we already had the hope in verse two. We did. We rejoice in hope of the glory of God. But you know what?

Sometimes that hope is sort of vague or theoretical. You know what it's like when you're a young Christian and you hear about heaven and you think, "It sounds great, but I'd rather wait. I'd like to get married first, or have a career, or see some things in the world." It's like heaven is sort of "out there" theoretically. And the return of Christ? We sometimes think, "Yes, Jesus, I want You to return, but not now."

But then you suffer, and you taste what sin has done—the fallenness of this world—God starts building virtue and character in you. As that character is being formed, you find yourself saying more and more, "Oh, God, my only hope is You. I want to be with You. Jesus, I long for Your return. Come, Lord Jesus." I didn't start saying that much until I started suffering some in life, then that became a prayer of mine. Character produces hope, stronger assurance, clarity, confidence. "*And hope,*" verse five, "*does not put us to shame.*" You will not be disappointed when you hope in Him.

Tim Keller says, "The benefits of justification are not diminished by suffering—they are enlarged by it." One of the great tests to see if we're living in the good of the gospel, if we're really deriving the comfort God wants us to receive from this doctrine of justification by faith, is to ask ourselves, "How am I doing in times of suffering? Is it drawing me closer to God? Is it refining my character? Does it make me long to be with Him more? Or is it pushing me away?"

If you do not know that God has accepted you, made peace with you, solely through the cross of Jesus, and that you are His forever, then when suffering comes you can really be shaken by it and really wonder, "Is God out to get me?" But if you rest in this truth of justification by faith, you can rejoice even in suffering. You can say with the prophet Habakkuk:

*Though the fig tree should not blossom,  
nor fruit be on the vines,  
the produce of the olive fail  
and the fields yield no food,  
the flock be cut off from the fold  
and there be no herd in the stalls,  
yet I will rejoice in the Lord;  
I will take joy in the God of my salvation.*

(Habakkuk 3:17-18)

Let's pray together.

Lord, let this be our experience. As the psalmist prays in Psalm 86, I pray for us: "*Gladden the soul of your servants, for to you, O Lord, do we lift up our souls.*" We lift up our souls to You Who have made peace with us through the blood of the cross. We lift up our souls to You Who have said, "Welcome. Draw near to Me with true hearts in full assurance of faith. You

have access into My presence; you stand in grace. We lift up our hearts to You Who promised that not an ounce of suffering will be wasted, but that every suffering we endure will only increase the weight of glory that we experience when we stand with You face to face. Gladden the souls of your servants, for to You, O Lord, we lift up our souls, and we say our only hope is You. Amen.

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