

How good are you at telling a story or a yarn? Are you able to captivate a crowd with your wit and talent? I'm guessing a bit like me, we really become quite shy and introverted if put on the spot like that. However there is one story in our lives that she should never have any hesitation to talk about, and that is our faith in Jesus. By that I don't mean something like, yeah – I believe in Jesus. Know I mean to tell the story of how Jesus means everything to you. Why do you choose to follow him, how does he impact your daily life. To me that is where the church of God must have a voice – it cannot be down to the minister at the front. Every one of us that has submitted to Christ as Lord should be able to go from here and tell their story of the good news – which is the Gospel that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the World.

Paul in our reading today kind of declares why it is so good to follow the teachings and life of Jesus Christ. There's 3 benefits that he lists which I think is important to remind ourselves of what this means to our lives.

He declares that there is Peace through Jesus
There's hope through adversity
And that there's reconciliation through death

I. Peace through Jesus (1-2)

The first benefit that we receive by placing our faith in God is peace with God. Let's see how that peace with God is made possible. Look at verses 1 and 2:

1 Therefore, since we have been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 We have also obtained access through him by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

There's a lot of people today who have no peace in their lives, and yet Paul declares that real peace, even in the midst of difficulties, comes through Jesus. He says that we have **access to the grace of God**, again by faith. Paul says that **we stand in this grace**. Grace is that undeserved constant love for us. Through Jesus, his grace floods over us. We're not just dipping a toe in it, we are standing in it!

I don't know about you, but that fills me with such a smile today. As Acts 4:12 says, ***“There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved.”*** Paul says that this hope brings us rejoicing.

The second benefit is that we have is

II. Hope through affliction (3-5)

Paul's not done. I love how he starts verse 3. He says, ***“And not only that . . .”*** It's as if Paul is saying like Jimmy Cricket, “Wait, there's more!” Look at verses 3-5:

3 And not only that, but we also rejoice in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, 4 endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope. 5 This hope will not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Let's pause here for just a moment with these words, ***“ . . . we also rejoice in our afflictions.”*** What in the world is going on here?

Let's be sure we know what afflictions are. Afflictions are hard. Afflictions are difficult. Afflictions are painful. Afflictions are when things go wrong. Afflictions involve suffering. Still, Paul says to rejoice in them.

I think it's really important that all of us know that if you love Jesus enough and have enough faith in God that you will not avoid the difficulties, hardships, sickness, poverty, and the like.

We see this throughout the bible - Abraham suffered affliction, Jacob suffered affliction, Moses suffered affliction, Joseph suffered affliction, David suffered affliction, Isaiah suffered affliction, Jeremiah suffered affliction, Elijah suffered affliction, Daniel suffered affliction, Nehemiah suffered affliction, John the Baptizer suffered affliction, Peter suffered affliction, Paul suffered affliction, John suffered affliction, James suffered affliction, Stephen suffered affliction, the early church suffered affliction, for hundreds of years missionaries have suffered affliction, ministers suffer affliction, faithful Christians suffer affliction, Jesus Himself suffered affliction.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:11, ***“You are blessed when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of me.”*** And so now, Paul says, “. . . ***we also rejoice in our afflictions.***”

Suffering goes hand in hand with the Gospel; we must understand that! In case we think that this is a crazy thought, Paul tells us why we rejoice in our afflictions. “. . . ***because we know that affliction produces endurance . . .***” “. . . ***endurance produces proven character . . .***” “. . . ***proven character produces hope.***”

So, as this progresses along we see that eventually our afflictions will lead to hope, by way of endurance and proven character.

We also learn that this is not just any old hope. Paul says in verse 5, ***“This hope will not disappoint us.”***

When all is said and done none of us will look back on the afflictions of this world and compare it to the great hope of God and say, “Well, that wasn't worth it!” None of us will say, “That was a ripoff.” No! We will not be disappointed!

This hope will not disappoint us because we will experience God's love being poured out in our hearts through the miraculous Holy Spirit.

You see, once you experience the great love of God, once you experience the Holy Spirit of God, there's nothing that this world can throw at you that will take away your hope.

Rejoice in your afflictions because it makes you more like Jesus, it makes you more like the apostles, it makes you more like the prophets, it makes you more like the early church and it gives you the hope of the love of God!

So, the second benefit of being declared righteous by faith is hope through affliction.

The final benefit that we experience is . . .

III. Reconciliation through death (6-11)

As we speak of reconciliation through death, of course, we're talking about the death of Jesus.

Paul points out first from verse 6 that we are helpless. There was nothing that we could do to help ourselves. We needed help. And help is exactly what God gave us and He gave it to us at just the right time.

Paul points out the miracle of the fact that Jesus died for the ungodly (that's us). Jesus died for us while we were ungodly, while we rejected God's ways, while we were enemies of God.

Paul points out that Jesus died for someone much worse than a mere enemy across the world. Jesus died for those who rejected God and those who brought about the need for the wrath of God to be poured out on sin.

God proved that He loved us because we were terrible sinners, yet Jesus died for us.

Paul then goes on to say that Jesus didn't just pay for our sins by His death, which is amazing enough. More than that, Jesus lived again and is claiming us as His own as He lives again. The fact that Jesus lives again is a testimony to the fact that He has brought us back to God; He has reconciled us to God and His life is the guarantee that if are in Him, we will never face the wrath of God.

Reconciliation is powerful. Reconciliation means bringing two sides together in agreement and harmony. Just imagine two major enemies coming together as those who love one another. That is nothing compared to the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ reconciling us to the Almighty God of the Universe.

Reconciliation is powerful, and it is through the death of Christ that we can be reconciled to God.

Concluding Thoughts:

As we conclude this sermon it's beautiful to note this fact: we needed to be saved from the wrath of God and the miracle of the Gospel is that it was God Himself who saved us. So, remember these benefits that come through faith in God's promises: peace through Jesus, hope through affliction, and reconciliation through death.

So how can we challenge ourselves into this coming week :

1. Enjoy the *peace* of God.

Enjoy the peace which God brings. You're not an enemy of God's, you're a friend.

2. Pass on the *peace* of God.

We have the ability to pass the peace of God to others. Through the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus, the hope found in God, and the reconciliation brought by the death of Jesus we can share the peace of God with others. Make a commitment this week to pass on the peace of God to others.