

By the Blood of Christ

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My father's home in Missouri is about a mile away from a huge limestone quarry. When I was growing up, they would periodically do blasting in the quarry, and even a mile away, the force of the explosion was enough to rattle the dishes. Of course, the quarry owners did not permit trespassers, so I never saw any of those explosions personally, but I'm sure they were quite impressive.

Even more impressively, there is a force many times as powerful at work in our spiritual lives. Dynamite can blow rocks into pieces, but it cannot accomplish forgiveness of sins. Indeed, in the visible and the invisible world, there is only one thing powerful enough to do that. Before we eat of the Lord's Supper, let's consider the blood of Christ.

Romans 5:1-11

The text that we're going to examine this morning to learn what Jesus has done is Romans 5:1-11. This context begins with Paul's discussion of **PEACE THROUGH FAITH**. Read with me in your Bibles from Romans 5:1-2. In context, in the last part of Romans 3 through Romans 4, Paul has just been discussing how it is that even though we cannot be justified by perfectly keeping the Law of Moses, we can be justified through faith in Christ. Like Abraham, even though we are not righteous, we can be counted as righteous because we believe in the promise of God.

In these first two verses, Paul begins to explain what the consequences of having been justified by our faith are. He doesn't lay them out chronologically, but we're going to approach the text that way. First in order of time, by our faith, Jesus introduces us into the grace of God. The older I get, the more I appreciate the power of an introduction. Every job that I've had in the past 15 years, I got because I knew somebody. I'm here at Joliet because David Banning, who is both a former preacher here and Joe's brother-in-law, put in a good word for me with him. In a similar way, Jesus sees our faith and because of it, puts in a good word for us with God, so that we can receive favor from Him.

Once we stand in the grace of God, through Jesus, God makes peace with us. He's no longer determined to be hostile to us as He was before. Instead, He is willing to be reconciled to us. Finally, because of our faith, Jesus gives us hope of the glory of God. We are spiritually in God's presence now, but we look forward to living with Him forever.

Next, Paul discusses the strange subject of **EXULTING IN TRIBULATION**. Let's read Romans 5:3-5 together. This is all the more interesting because many modern-day Christians have no interest in tribulation. They want everything in this life to go as smoothly and painlessly as possible. They especially don't want any tribulation connected with being a noisy disciple of Jesus. First-century Christians, on the other hand, had a very different outlook. They knew that persecution because of their faith was inevitable, but they regarded it not as a problem, but as a benefit.

In our lives, then, let's consider the benefits that arise because of the tribulations we face, particularly when we suffer for the cause of Christ. First, tribulation produces perseverance. The more we suffer for the Lord, the less likely we are to let go of Him. Second, it proves our character. Anybody can be righteous and serve God when it's easy. However, only someone who truly loves the Lord is going to continue doing the right thing when there are obvious negative consequences associated with doing so. Finally, tribulation brings about hope. When everything in our lives is going fine, we have a tendency to get lulled to sleep by the joys of this life. We start thinking it would be fine to stay here forever, and we lose interest in going to heaven. Tribulation, on the other hand, is a reminder that this life is imperfect, sometimes brutally so. When we suffer, then, it sharpens our hunger to spend eternity someplace better.

Paul notes that the hope we have of heaven is a hope that is trustworthy, a hope that will not disappoint us. We know that it won't disappoint us because the Holy Spirit has revealed God's love to us. In the first century, that happened through miraculous spiritual gifts. Today, we learn about God's love through the written word, which reveals that He has always been faithful to those who love and serve Him. If we do the same, we can expect Him to be faithful to us.

However, an even more important element of our hope is that **WHILE WE WERE YET SINNERS**, Christ died for us. Paul explains this in Romans 5:6-8. Remember, Paul spent the bulk of the first three chapters of Romans talking about how much God hates sin, and about how because of their sin, everybody, Jew and Gentile alike, can expect nothing but wrath from Him. We all know that we have sinned. Why should we expect glory instead of wrath?

Paul tells us that it's not because of any inherent virtue in us. We were ungodly, and we were helpless to rescue ourselves. The only hope we had was Christ dying in our place. Paul then invites us to consider that in human terms. If we were the Father, would we send our Son to die for a righteous man? Certainly not! A righteous man wouldn't need anybody to die for him. How about sending Jesus to die for a good man? Well, maybe, if someone had committed a sin or two and just needed a little bit of help to get him over the top. However, that's not the position we were in. We hadn't sinned once or twice. We were sinners, dedicated to a life of selfishness and rebellion against God.

To put things in modern-day political terms, we weren't the deserving poor. We were the undeserving poor. We were that hypothetical welfare queen who just wanted to sit around and watch Jerry Springer all day. The only thing we

deserved from God was death. What we got was Jesus, who came to earth and willingly shed His blood to pay the price for our sins. God's love for mankind is revealed throughout the Bible, but never more clearly than in Jesus.

Finally, Paul details some of the other benefits we receive **THROUGH JESUS**. Look at Romans 5:9-11. In just this little three-verse snippet, some variant of the phrase "by Jesus" or "through Jesus" appears five times. We've already talked about the first—justification by His blood. The second is that we are saved from the wrath of God through Him. People in the world don't get this—that God really, really is going to condemn every sinner to hell on the day of judgment, because sin angers Him that much. If it weren't for Jesus, we would be going there too.

Third, we are reconciled to God. This is hard to imagine. Let's imagine for a moment that we were face-to-face with someone who had committed the most outrageous act we can think of—say, one of those guys who breaks into a school and guns down a bunch of innocent children. What would it take for us to be reconciled to that man, to forgive him and be on friendly terms with him? That's the way that God looks at our sin. On our own, we are that abhorrent in His eyes. However, the blood of Jesus is powerful enough to reconcile even us to Him.

Fourth, we are saved by the life of Jesus. Because of His resurrection, we can be sure that we have the hope of eternal life too. Finally, through Jesus, we can exult in God. Before Jesus, what reason did we have to rejoice in our Creator? Before Jesus, what He meant to us was that we were going to be dead meat. But through Jesus, rather than cowering in fear of His justice, we can praise Him for His mercy.

This is what it means for us to be Christians. We were ruined. We were helpless. We were hopeless. However, Jesus rescued us from the mess we were in at the cost of His own life. We owe Him so much, and the least we can do is to remember what He has done for us in the way He requested, by sharing in this symbolic meal of bread and fruit of the vine every first day of the week. Let's honor Him in our hearts now as we partake of the Lord's Supper.