

The Ground of Hopeful Confidence

Romans 5:5-11

*"...but God shows **His love** for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*

Introduction: One of my favorite stories in all of Scripture is known as "The Prodigal Son" (Luke 15:11-24), a parable of loss, love, and reconciliation. If *hearing that our children walk in the truth* (3 John 4) is one of the greatest joys in all of life, then the opposite is also true, hearing that they leave us and the Lord in rebellion. It is a mark of youthful pride to not only rebel against our parents' wishes and teaching, but to think that we have it all figured out or that we know best. Often we do not know or understand the pain and sadness that this causes parents until we become parents ourselves, coming to the realization of a love that can only be experienced, not just explained.

The familiar story is powerful because it is practical and relatable, telling a story that is experienced by many a modern family. A young, impudent, independent son wants out from his parent's rules, life, and care, but wants it on his own terms. "Give me my inheritance now", which simply signaled he'd rather have his father dead than alive, so he could finally do whatever his heart wanted to, believing this would be the path of the elusive happiness he had been chasing. The father wisely lets the son go, letting him experience the fruit of his decision, hoping and anticipating his return. The beautiful scene brings more tear to my eyes the longer I'm alive and experience the deep sadness of watching youthful rebellion: *as the rebellious son returns home after squandering all his money and realizing there was something FAR BETTER with his father, the father sprints after him, embracing and kissing him, and restoring him to full rights in the family.* If there was one story that illustrates the beauty of the gospel, and one that I'd choose to preach the rest of my life, it'd be this one.

But there are plenty of questions in this story that are not answered, since it goes outside of the scope of Jesus' purpose in telling it. The story has an indelible 'happy ending', but our experience does not always end like this. *Why did the son rebel? If God is the giver of grace to believe, why did he let the son go and rebel? What purpose did that serve?* Playing the story out a bit more, I'm sure the younger brother in the story had questions: *will my father accept me after all that I did? Will I have to live in shame? Even though he embraced me when I got back, what happens when the emotions relent and he realizes all that I did? Will He reject me then?*

The reason I bring this story up is because it illustrates the position we are in often in our life of faith with a God who does things according to the purposes of His own glory, not our own. So many things happen in our life that are out of our control, that we do not like, that we would not choose, that cause pain, and that touch the most important people in our lives. These are things we cannot fix. We cannot solve. Sometimes we run out of answers. So the question is: *what do we do, how do we think, and what do we cling to IN THE MIDST of loss, pain, and the things we do not understand?*

Two weeks ago we looked at a **chain of results of being justified by faith alone**, results of new life in Christ where we are declared righteous and receiving the righteousness of Christ. We have **peace with God** where there used to be enmity. We have **access into His grace**, which allows us to hope in the glory of God. We have **joy in affliction and suffering**, since we KNOW the REASON God puts us through everything: *suffering ----- endurance ----- proven character ----- hope*. That means HOPE is solidified THROUGH the hard, excruciating, sometimes infuriating trials of life, since it leaves us with nothing else to do EXCEPT to trust the Lord, knowing that our tested and genuine faith is more precious than gold (1 Pet. 1:7).

Now, there is an important caveat as we consider **the ground of hopeful confidence** we have in the midst of the hard and afflicting times, particularly in passages that answer some questions but can leave others feeling like they are dangling. The answer to making sense of our pain is the same answer of finding hope in our sin: we **trust God in Christ by faith through the grace given to us**. When we embrace that answer, we can move forward in hope. When we search for alternative answers, we will be left wanting, anxious, and discontent, frustrated that WE don't get the type of answer WE are looking for or that will help US make sense of it. In other words, faith always drives us to greater dependency and trust, which will produce hope, among other things. So it is in light of this reality that we look at **three foundational areas of hopeful confidence that we can bank on in light of the hard and trying parts of life**.

The Ground of Unique Love (5:5-8)

*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.*

⁶For while we were still **weak**, at the right time **Christ died for the ungodly**. ⁷For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— ⁸but **God shows his love for us** in that while we were still **sinners**, Christ died for us

There are many factors that shape our view of God. God presents Himself as our Father, which means that our *parents* are the first impact and imprint of how we understand God: either gracious or rule based, lovingly disciplined or absent, personal or distant. But Scripture also forms how God is to be seen, and Paul had a clear and intentional unfolding of the nature of God. Though he mentioned the church at Rome being “loved by God” (1:7) in his introduction, the emphasis on the nature and motivation of God has not been His love. We have seen His glory, power, righteousness, wrath, grace, redemption, and promises, but we have not seen what motivates Him to move toward us yet. In fact, it may have come across that God, being the divine Judge, can be seen as just and forgiving, but NOT approachable and kind. But God's love for us is a MAJOR emphasis here and in the rest of Romans. The question may be asked: **how do we KNOW if God loves us, especially when our experiences do not add up?**

God's love is GUARANTEED through the Spirit

We all appreciate being told and reminded that we are loved. Very few people are ok with their spouse saying, “I told you I loved you when we got married, and if something changes, I'll let you know”. To hear we are loved by the same person over and over is not being needy, it is being human. Since God designed us, He knew we needed this kind of reminder. *How are we assured of God's love?* God gave us the **Holy Spirit** at the moment of conversion, when we were justified and declared righteous by faith, as a **guarantee** of our salvation. “*He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee*” (2 Cor. 5:5) The Spirit is the **firstfruit of the full harvest of our salvation** (Rom 8:23) and the deposit guaranteeing our inheritance (Eph. 1:13-14). The Holy Spirit is like an **engagement ring** (or more like a *betrothal ring*) which is a guarantee of a future wedding. He reminds us that God's love for us is sure, present, future, and established once for all (“poured out” is in the perfect tense, giving an ongoing state established by a once for all act). God's love for us is as sure as the Holy Spirit being given to us.

God's love is GIVEN while we were Undeserving

One of the hallmarks of God's love for us is that it **INITIATES in spite of any movement of the object of love toward Him**. This is important, since the only way we can love God is if HE LOVED US FIRST (1 John 4:10). Notice the description of who God loved:

1. **Weak** – This word can be translated as “sick”, but it is the type of sickness that leaves us wasted away without strength. It is the opposite of power (1 Cor. 15:43), leaving us powerless.
2. **Ungodly** – This is wickedness, but also living like there is no God, never acknowledging Him or His glory.
3. **Sinners** – One who commits sin continually
4. **Enemies** – Those who are at odds and set against God

Summing these up paints a picture NOT of those who were knocking on heaven’s door wanting to get in, but rather a group of people who not only had no ability to love God, but no DESIRE to do so. And who was this group who was the object of God’s love: “we” (v. 6, 8), and “us” (v.5, 8). Those who were sinful, wretched, with nothing to offer and who shook our fists in high handed rebellion were those that Jesus loved.

God’s love is SHOWN by a Sacrificial and Substitutionary Death

What was “the right time” of this love poured out according to verse 6? It was at the perfect time in history (Gal. 4:4), where Christ fulfilled both prophecy and promise, and where He came when those He would save were NOT looking for Him, or at least not looking for the right version of Him. *How was His love shown or demonstrated?*

1. **In a UNIQUE WAY** – Paul gives a general comparison of how the world loves and how it contrasts with Jesus’ love. The world would RARELY die for a righteous person (especially a self-righteous one) and would SOMETIMES die for a good person (5:7). We could come up with stories of sacrifice for a brother in arms, spouse, or child, a person that we truly loved. In fact, Jesus said there is no greater love than someone laying his life down for his friends (John 15:13). But you would have to comb through a mountain of stories to find someone sacrificing his life for his **enemies or who hated him** and find very few. The point Paul is making is clear: Jesus’ love was sacrificial by giving up His life, but also in the fact that it was directed toward those who were by definition weak and enemies. And that was US!!!
2. **As a Substitution** – God could have come up with a plan to ransom back those He loved by paying a different price, but His method was that of **a life for a life**. This makes the atoning work of Christ effective AND personal, where Christ WILLINGLY took our place for judgement we absolutely deserved. Again, I’d be willing to give my life up for any of my girls, but for an arch enemy would seem the wrong kind of foolish. But in this we have the **epitome of love on our behalf**, that Christ would DIE FOR ME, to satisfy the wrath and righteousness of God, because He loved me.

Seeing God’s love this way does not answer every question we have about His love. It does not quell the question of why does He love me and seemingly not others? Why does He allow for people to reject Him or to not have the faith to believe? But Paul is not writing about those things here, but to believers who have trusted Christ for their righteousness and repented of their sin. It is those who can be assured of massive, earth shattering, immense, and personal love. And whenever we find ourselves questioning whether or not He loves us in the midst of trial, pain, sadness, or frustration, we merely look at the cross and remember the depth and object of His love. Whenever we begin to question **why** He does not save a person we love and pray for, we remember that we had no business being objects at all! The real question is not why God doesn’t save some, the question is why does God save any. And the answer is the same: because of His love for sinners demonstrated by His death on the cross.

The Ground of Sure Salvation (5:9)

*Since, therefore, we have now been **justified** by his blood, much more **shall we be saved** by him **from the wrath of God***

Talk is cheap when it comes to professions of love. It is far easier to say “I love you” than actually committing to the sacrifice and commitment that the profession requires. I’ve told the story before that when I professed my love to a young woman I was dating (who would later become my first wife), she answered NOT with the expected affirmation of love in return, but the question: “*what do you mean by that?*” Yikes. What do I mean by that?!?! You know, I love you, man...’

To further connect the dots of the professed AND demonstrated love of Christ for His own, Paul connects another link in the chain. Summarizing his argument from the first 4 chapters and reminding us that we were justified by faith, but at the **cost of the shed blood of Christ**, echoing the truth that our salvation is both **free AND costly**. *Grace is unearned, but it was NOT cheap* since it came at the cost of the blood of Jesus shed on the cross.

But what are we saved from? We are saved FROM the WRATH of God! God’s wrath is not always studied or understood, but if we actually did comprehend God’s holiness and glory, we would have a better understanding of why He will pour out His wrath on wickedness (Psa. 75:8; Isaiah 26:21; Rev. 14:10) with stored up fury (Rev. 16:19). God is patient now to see all those that He’s called come to a saving knowledge in Christ, but at some point, it will run out. (2 Pet. 3:9-10). He will exercise justice on the earth and wicked, wringing out His wrath until all are judged justly and the world itself is burned up, since it’s been corrupted by sin itself. This judgment is sure, total, and ultimate. But NOT for those who have been justified by the blood of Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 1:10 *“and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come”*

How was God’s wrath satisfied, and how do we know we are loved and secure? It is in the fact that Jesus **drank the cup of God’s wrath on the cross**. When Jesus asked for the cup to pass while He prayed to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane before going to the cross, He was referencing the “cup of wrath” laid out in the Old Testament (Matt. 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42; Jer. 25:15; Is. 51:17, 22). It was NOT the mere physical suffering that Jesus agonized over, but the fact that He became sin for us, with God treating Jesus like He should have treated us for an eternity. God wrung out all of the sin we’ve committed and will commit on the Son, and Jesus took it **out of love**, becoming a curse, though He had done nothing to deserve it. This is the epitome of love, since He did NOT want us to face the wrath of God and took it on Himself instead. But this loving act was not only to keep us away from pain and punishment, it had another goal in mind, which Paul began to thread together in another letter:

1 Thessalonians 5:9-11 *“For God has not **destined us for wrath**, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us **so that** whether we are awake or asleep we **might live with him**. 11 Therefore **encourage** one another and **build one another up**, just as you are doing.*

The Ground of Joyful Reconciliation (5:10-11)

*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. 11 More than that, we also **rejoice** in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received **reconciliation***

It is possible to do something nice and sacrificial for someone that you DO NOT want a relationship with, or that you do not truly like. This can happen in business, the workplace, and even in the home. But the amazing fact of our salvation in Jesus is this: though I had *nothing* to offer Him, and though I was His **enemy** who was weak, ungodly and sinful, He not only died on my behalf, but He wanted to have me **reconciled to Him!** *Reconciliation* is moving from a state of enmity and separation due to sin to one of peace, harmony, and friendship. If *justification* is a legal status, then *reconciliation* is **personal status**. Jesus did not save us to keep us distant, but to be able to glorify Him by being satisfied IN Him. The God of the universe who was offended and ready to pour out His wrath on us DESIRES to bring us back to Himself in a peaceful, holistic, and intimate relationship with Him.

This is ground for **rejoicing**. Notice in verse 11 Paul uses the word “rejoice” or “boast” to depict our response to the reality that we are SAVED, SECURE, and RECONCILED. He does not keep us far away but brings us close, like a dad with a guilt ridden child who cannot move his eyes off the ground. This is fundamentally unique and glorious in a universe that offers no other religion or worldview where a Divine being would willingly condescend to be in relationship with sinful and created beings. But here is what Jesus anticipated as He fixed His eyes on the cross:

John 17:3 “*And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent*”

This knowledge is not merely intellectual but rather experiential. Jesus bought us by His blood so that we are brought close, restored, and actually know Him in an intimate way, the kind of relationship that is echoed in humanity. It is mirrored in spouses who move from facts about each other to deep understanding of how the other thinks, feels, and delights. It is the relationship that is NOT driven by **duty but delight**, not from earning but pleasing, not from gaining but serving. This moves salvation from **transactional** where we are thankful to God but distant to one that is **relational and transformational**. This changes the reason we discipline ourselves for godliness. Instead of checking boxes of reading our Bible, praying, attending, giving, and serving while our hearts are distant, we seek to know our God through Jesus Christ and to be satisfied in Him, so we pursue Him through the **means** of these things.

This is what Paul discovered and rejoiced in throughout his post conversion life. He had tried all kinds of **means** to be righteous, from keeping the Law, to gaining position as a Pharisee, to zealously persecuting the upstart religion that followed the declared Messiah named Jesus (Phil. 3:2-6). But when Jesus saved Him on the road to Damascus, everything changed. He stopped trying to find meaning in religion and earning through effort, but instead figured out the **joyful mystery of the universe**:

Philippians 3:7-9 “*But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may **gain Christ** 9 and be found in him, **not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith**”*

Justification and reconciliation are fused together! We no longer try to earn or gain standing with God, but revel and rest in the work and love of Jesus! Do you see it!!! Does this mean we have everything figured out or understand everything God does? By no means. But it does mean that the **surpassing value and worth that we seek in this life is Christ, since it is a sure relationship that will never be taken away.**

Is this how you pursue your life in Christ? Can you rejoice in the midst of pain and questions because you know Christ and are at peace with Him? We can rejoice because we are just like the younger son who returned to His father in the “Prodigal Son”. What was the assurance that he had that his Father would not change His mind and kick him out? The assurance was the **love that he knew his Father had for him, and that love would never change and could never be separated.**

Romans 8:38-39 *“For I am **sure** that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 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**”*

We know God’s love because it was demonstrated to us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who saved us from the wrath of God and brings us into an eternal relationship with Him. That is grounds to rejoice!!!