GOD’S GREAT GRACE

Romans 5:1-21
Key Verse: 5:21

“...so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

In last week’s passage, we learned that sinful men can be justified before the Holy God only by faith. The faith that God accepts as righteousness is the faith of Abraham, who, against all hope, in hope believed the promise of God to him. The promise of God to us is found in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Lord. He died for our sins, and rose again to life for our justification. This promise is for the great and the small alike. No matter who we may be, and what we have done, faith in Jesus is enough to make us right with God and help us bear the fruit that leads to eternal life.

In today's passage, Paul teaches us the confidence that we have when we are justified by faith. At first, to depend on grace rather than on our self-righteousness makes us feel that we are tight-rope walking with a blindfold on and our hands tied. How can we have the confidence of Abraham in what we cannot see, or trust so absolutely in what someone else will do? There is a saying: “Nothing is certain in life except for death and taxes.” Through today's passage, Paul denies this common sense idea, and proclaims the grace of God that is greater than sin and greater than death. May God bless us through this passage to meditate newly on the unshakeable grace of God that is ours through Jesus Christ. In this way, may God keep our hearts right with him as we take our stand on his grace by faith.

I. Since we have been justified (5:1-11)

Look at verse 1 and 2a. “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.” In this verse, Paul summarizes the transformation that
takes place in our lives when we no longer seek to justify ourselves, but trust in God who justifies the wicked.

First of all, justification by faith gives us peace with God. As we studied in Romans chapters 1-3, the wrath of God is being revealed against the wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness. The law was given to make men conscious of this reality. But the law is powerless to change sinners. God could have left us alone to face the judgment and condemnation that our sins deserved. Instead, God sacrificed his one and only Son, Jesus Christ, to redeem us from our sins through his blood. When we are justified by faith in his blood, we are no longer considered enemies of God. Instead, we are at peace with God. This is the amazing grace of God.

Human beings really want to have peace with God. They are sick and tired of being slaves of sin. They are sick and tired of living according to their cursed desires. They are sick and tired of being their own worst enemy. Therefore, the peace of God is the best gift to all human beings. But how can we receive it? We must receive the justification that is by faith. We must trust in the power of God’s grace to take away the sin of the world.

One young woman felt that her life was cursed by God due to the violent relationship that existed between her mother and father. She tried to escape the curse in many ways, such as boys, drinking and material wealth, but none of them worked. She was so able, but all of her labor seemed to be in vain. Finally, she accepted her sister’s invitation to come to the Christmas worship service in Chicago. Through the story of the baby Jesus in the manger who came to take away our sins, she could experience the forgiveness and mercy of God personally. For the first time, she experienced that real peace with such a humble God was possible, and she broke down and cried. Now, instead of expecting failure, she can attempt great things for God because she knows that by God’s help she can do them. May God bless all American college students to know the justification that comes by faith in Jesus Christ, and have real peace with God. Let’s read verse 1 together. “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”
Second of all, we can stand in God’s grace. Justification before God means that sinners can now stand before God and be declared “not guilty” by God’s grace. Look at verse 2a. “through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.” Where we stand is very important, just as the foundation of a house or building is vitally important. Before we met Christ Jesus and put our faith in him, we didn’t know where we stood with God or with others. We tried hard to take our stand on our abilities or on our self-righteousness. But we never felt secure, because our abilities fade, and our standards for behavior change. Now, we know that we stand before God because of his grace. And on this grace we can stand firmly and confidently in the face of trials, hardships, doubts and failures. Archimedes once said, “Give me a lever, and I’ll move the world.” Standing on God’s grace gives sinners leverage and strength to overcome the world.

One young man was in his senior year in high school when he suddenly realized that he was going to graduate soon, and then have to get a job. He panicked, and had to go to a psychiatrist to deal with his feelings of insecurity. His doctor gave him Prozac and other medications, which made it impossible for him to look anyone in the eye, and made him tired all the time. After several years at a community college, he met a very spiritual lady who began Bible study with him. Soon afterward he went to college to study business, and began Bible study with his shepherd. He was asked to share his testimony on what Jesus’ death on the cross meant to him at the Easter Bible conference. But he was really tired because the only food he likes is pizza, which they didn’t have at the conference site, so he hadn’t been eating. In his despair, he asked not to give his testimony. But then, he thought about Jesus and how he had died on the cross for him. God’s grace to him through Jesus’ cross enabled him to get up, though he was tired and fearful, and share his testimony. And he never forgot from then on that God’s grace was sufficient to help him stand in any situation, no matter how tired or hungry he was. Now, he can look others in the eyes, and he has a hope to marry a spiritual woman in God’s time. This reminds us of Ephesians 6:13. “Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able
to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.” Our spiritual battle while living in this world is not complicated: it is to keep standing. May God help us to take our stand in his grace.

Thirdly, we can rejoice. Paul mentions at least three reasons for joy in verses 2-11. The Christian life is one of joy, because of our sure hope in the gift of righteousness that comes by faith in Jesus Christ.

First of all, we rejoice because we have a hope to experience the glory of God. Look at verse 2b. “And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.” Jesus prayed in John 17:24, “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.” Jesus’ sincerest prayer for us is that our lives may not end in shame, but in glory. In the world, not even the greatest sports hero, or the bravest general is honored forever. The glory of their accomplishments fade, and then their warts are brought out into the public. Worldly glory is an empty promise. But the glory of God is greater by far than any worldly glory or fame. This glory is forever, and it is by faith. We rejoice in this hope, because it is ours by grace alone.

We also can rejoice in sufferings. Look at verses 3 and 4. “Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.” It is because when we stand on the grace of God, we can see beyond the present hardship or trial. We gain God’s divine perspective to see where suffering in God leads us. Jesus promised his disciples: “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33). Taking heart in the face of suffering helps us grow in perseverance. Abraham who, against all hope, in hope believed in God’s promise to give him a son, shows us what is perseverance. The struggle to persevere in the face of adversity requires a decision of faith. Decisions of faith are what define and develop our character. Finally, having character brings hope. Actually, it’s important to think about why character brings hope. Growing in character means developing our inner man, our integrity, honesty, faithfulness, courage, etc. When we see ourselves growing in these things, we are happy, because we all want to be worthy and a
blessing to others. We should not remain as we are: emotional, unpredictable, weak and fearful. So God trains us to grow in his image by learning his faithfulness and shepherd heart. God’s hope for us to grow in his image becomes our hope to be like him one day. 1 John 3:2,3 says, “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope purifies himself, just as he is pure.” The solid foundation of God’s grace enables us to see our lives from God’s perspective, and to rejoice in every trial and hardship that prepares us for the glory that is to come.

Of course, our greatest reason to rejoice is the awareness of God’s love. Look at verse 5. “And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.” God’s love poured out into our hearts convinces us that the foundation of God’s grace is secure, and that the hope that we strive for is sure. But how can we really know that the grace of God will not be withdrawn from us at the crucial moment, like some cruel joke? Look at verse 6. “You see, at just the right time, when we were still sinners, Christ died for the ungodly.” Just as God’s gracious promise came to Abraham when he was most full of despair, so the gracious gift of forgiveness of sins came to us through Jesus Christ while we were powerless because of sin. Human beings treasure their own lives most. Therefore, to give up our lives for someone else is not easy at all. Just possibly, someone might dare to die for a good man. No one, however, is going to die for drug dealers, terrorists or political tyrants! Look at verse 8. “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” We can stand on God’s grace, and we can rejoice in God, because of what Christ did for us while we were still sinners. In the movie, “The Hiding Place,” Corrie Ten Boom’s sister told her while in a Nazi prison camp, “There is no hole so deep that God can not get us out.” Our confidence in God’s love does not depend on our feelings or actions or circumstances. It is rooted in the unchangeable fact of what Christ did for us on the cross. Such a love can never be taken away. Such a love is more than enough, not only to justify us, but also to save us from wrath and give us eternal life. Look at verse 10. “For if, when we were God’s enemies,
we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life.” Therefore, our true joy is in God himself, who loves us, and in Christ Jesus, who died for us. Look at verse 11. “Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”

Paul has been talking up to this point about what we have received from Christ through justification by faith. It seems so easy; all we have to do is believe, and we have peace, joy and love that leads to eternal life! The fact that it is not as easy as it sounds is hinted at in verses 3-5. Why should those who are justified before God have to suffer at all? Isn’t suffering punishment for our sins and failures? Or are we really reconciled to God? Look again at verse 6. “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.” The right time for Christ to help us was not when we were bold, courageous and strong, but when we were totally helpless due to sin. In order to rescue us from sin, Christ took the punishment due our sin upon himself. In fact, he died in terrible sufferings on the cross. Sinful man could not take up such a burden for another sinful man. But the righteous Son of God could and did.

So, we must examine ourselves. We who are reconciled to God by faith have nothing to fear any more from God’s wrath. Our hope in God’s glory is sure, even as Christ’s was before he went to the cross. Therefore, we who have been reconciled to God through his cross are obligated by this love to serve the powerless, just as Christ served us. We cannot serve the powerless according to our convenience. We must serve them according to their need. Just as Christ suffered to demonstrate God’s love for us, so we must suffer in order to make God’s love known to them. This is the righteousness that we have by faith. Not that we have anything to give others from ourselves. But what we have received from God, we can pass on to those in need. May God bless us, as sinners reconciled to him by faith, to pass on the gracious gift of mercy and love for the powerless through 1 to 1 Bible study, until America can be transformed by this grace into a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.
II. Grace more certain than death

In Romans 5:12-21 Paul draws a contrast between the result of Adam's sin and of God's gracious gift. In this way, we can discover the true power of God's grace to transform sinners. The fruit of Adam's one sin is obvious and devastating. Look at verse 14. “Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come.” Once sin and death came into the world, there was no escape for man from his fate to live and then die. In fact, to live on this earth is to live in the kingdom of death.

What can challenge the supreme rule of death over all men? Look at verses 15-17. “But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.” Death is the consequence of one man's disobedience. When one man sinned, all men came to be under the power of sin and death. But what was begun through one act of disobedience has been overturned by Christ's one act of righteousness. Look at verses 18 and 19. “Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.” Adam's one sin brought condemnation and death into the world. How much more then will Christ's one act of righteousness bring righteousness and life to all those who believe.

Sin and death seem to have an ever increasing hold on men's hearts. The law was given to men, but it only made us more conscious of sin, and more condemned because of our trespasses. But as deep as the
hole we dig for ourselves became, so the level of grace from God has increased all the more. Finally in God's time, that grace was made known to all men through Jesus Christ and his death for us on the cross. Death is certain, but his grace to us is all the more certain. Look at verse 21. “... so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” As sure as we were that everything and everyone we knew and loved would be gone in 50 years time, we can be sure now that we have an eternal inheritance in heaven that is ours by faith through Christ Jesus.

Our Christian life is only as strong as the foundation it rests upon. We may admire moral character, charismatic presentation and courageous fortitude in ourselves and in those around us. But these all fail before the power of death. There is only one foundation that can stand toe to toe with death, and win. It is the gift of God through Christ Jesus our Lord. It is the grace of forgiveness of our sins, the righteousness that is by faith, justification and the salvation of our souls. May God bless you to practice this grace as shepherds for needy American college students. May God bless American college students to trust in the unshakeable foundation of God's grace for sinners through Jesus Christ.