

Romans 5:6-11

If a total stranger would peek in the door of our church today, what do you think he would **see**? Would he see people who are **happy** to be here - people who are **happy** to be members of God's family? Of **course** he would. But unfortunately, he might not **realize** that all of us really are **happy**. Have you ever looked at **yourself**, or at some of the people **around** you, and wondered if perhaps there was something **wrong** with showing that you are a **happy** Christian? Quite often we look pretty **gloomy** and **serious** on the outside; and we tend to blame our stern, sober faces and blank stares on our predominantly **German** heritage, or more recently on all the **problems** that are manifesting themselves in the world around us. But let's set the record straight. Our predecessors and our environment are not to blame if we appear to be sad and glum. **We** are to blame. And worse than that, we have **no reason** to go around looking like a bunch of "sad sacks." God has literally **poured** out His blessings upon us - not in a slow and steady **drip**, but in an abundantly flowing **stream**. So, **Rejoice! God Has Done Much For You.**

The Apostle Paul begins to point out these rich blessings from God with the fact that we have been **justified** by faith. In order to understand why Paul must start **there**, it is important that we understand our **natural** status. We know that we are **sinful** by nature. Sin has caused a **separation** - a virtual **chasm** between God and man. Because of sin, we are at **war** with God - constantly **battling** against **Him**, and against His **laws** - the 10 Commandments which He has provided for our own **protection**. Because of sin, we are **unwilling** and **unable** to come to terms with God. We have no **bargaining** power. We are unable to **bridge** the gap which our sinful condition has brought about. If any progress is going to be made in resolving the differences which exist between God and man, that progress must come **apart** from us. And it **has**! Jesus, the Prince of Peace, has taken upon **Himself** the responsibility of resolving the differences between God and man. He is our **Mediator** - our **go-between** - the one who has **bridged** the gap created by sin.

Paul says that we have been justified by **faith**, not by our **works**. God has given us this justification by **declaring** that we are righteous, in much the same way as a **judge** would declare (or announce) that a defendant is **not guilty**. Because the **guilt** is gone and the **separation** has been removed, we now have **peace** - peace of conscience and mind - **inner** peace - **spiritual** peace. This is **not** an **earthly** peace, as Jesus Himself pointed out. He told His disciples, "*Do **not** suppose that I have come to bring **peace** to the **earth**. I did **not** come to bring **peace**, but a **sword**.*" Jesus also said, "*I have told you these things, so that you may have **peace** in **me**. In this **world** you are going to have **trouble**. But be **courageous**! I have **overcome** the*

world.”

Along this line, **Luther** made a couple of interesting comparisons. On the one hand, he said, a **righteous** person has **peace** with **God**, and **tribulations** with the **world** - because his life is **spiritual**, not **worldly**. On the other hand, a person who is **unrighteous** has **peace** with the **world**, but has **anguish** and **tribulation** with **God** - because his life is **worldly**, not **spiritual**. That makes a lot of **sense**, doesn't it? The **second** important comparison which Luther observed, was that since God is **eternal**, so is the **peace** which He provides. And since the present world is only **temporary**, so also is the peace which **it** offers. God has given us **spiritual** peace through faith in Jesus - peace which will last **forever** - therefore, we have cause for great **rejoicing** in our lives.

But there is **more!** Since we have **peace** with God, we also have **access** to Him. As I said before, in Jesus, God has **bridged** the gap between Himself and man. Nothing lies between us to **hinder** our approach to Him. All the **obstacles** have been **removed**. We call this access to God - the privilege of **prayer**.

And what a privilege it is! Prayer allows us to talk with the Almighty God at any **time**, from any **place**, with any **message**. I don't think that we always realize how **convenient** that is for us. Perhaps I can illustrate it for you in this way. I grew up in a very old house. In almost every room there was only **one** electrical outlet. So, it seemed like no matter which room of the house you were in, you could never find an outlet to use. The **short-term** solution was either to find an **extension cord** which could be plugged into an outlet in another room, or to find and use a multiple plug **adapter**. Unfortunately, both of those items were **also** quite **rare** in our house - and they were extremely **difficult** to **locate** - except of course when you didn't **need** them. The **long-term** solution was to **upgrade** the electrical service, and install more **outlets**; which over a period of time, we **did**. Now, compare **that** to **prayer**. Without making any **changes** in ourselves, without any **upgrading**, without any **searching** or **delays**, we have the privilege of plugging in to the power and strength of **God Himself!** God's limitless help and power is available to us **immediately**.

It should be quite easy for us to see why having **peace** with God and **access** to God are reasons for **rejoicing**. But just **prior** to our text, Paul entered into an area where it **isn't** so obvious. He said, *“We also rejoice confidently in our **sufferings**, because we know that suffering produces patient **endurance**, and patient endurance produces tested **character**, and tested character produces **hope**.”* In our human minds, **suffering** and **rejoicing** seem to be mutually **exclusive** ideas. Almost without exception, when God allows **sufferings** and trials and tribulations to enter

our lives, we end up feeling **let down** and **persecuted**. Generally, we also end up **blaming God** for our negative feelings. We say things like, “God **makes** me so **angry** when He sends sufferings to me. He **makes** me impatient and irritable. I **fight** with my wife, **yell** at my kids, and even **kick** my dog - and it’s all **God’s** fault.” But what we fail to realize is that neither **God** nor our **sufferings** have made us angry, or impatient, or irritable. God has simply **used** sufferings to **magnify** the fact that we **are** angry, impatient, and irritable **by nature**. Suffering shows us “what we are **made** of,” and how **frail** we really are. Perhaps that’s why we **don’t** rejoice in our sufferings. We don’t like to have our faults, and weaknesses, and warts **magnified** so that everybody can **see** them. We like to keep those things as **quiet** and **hidden** as possible.

Yet, God sees much **benefit** in showing our **sinful nature** exactly as it **is**. It’s important for us to realize how weak **we** are, and how strong **God** is. God wants to teach us the same lesson which He taught the Apostle Paul through his “*thorn in the flesh*.” He told Paul and us, “*My grace is sufficient for you, because my power is made perfect in weakness*.” At the times when **we** are **weak**, it’s crystal clear to us that we can’t depend on **ourselves** - and that’s when we turn to **God**, just the way He **wants** us to. It may take some **time**, but when we have learned the lesson **well**, the whole process will finally make **sense**, and we’ll respond just as **Paul** did by saying, “*I will be glad to boast all the more in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may shelter me. That is why I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties, for the sake of Christ. For whenever I am weak, then am I strong*” - strong because of the power of God.

It is **no** mere **coincidence** that Paul told the Romans, “*For at the appointed time, while we were still helpless, Christ died for the ungodly*.” God’s timing was **perfect**. Through this most **unusual** event, God chose to show His **love** - a love which goes far **beyond** human love or understanding. And because of the **timing**, there could be absolutely **no doubt** about whose **power** was making it happen - it was through **God’s** power **alone**. Paul goes on to say that everyone **sympathizes** with a person who has been **condemned**. Nobody wants to see the **ungodly** to be **lost** for all eternity. But at the same time very **few**, if **any** would actually offer their **own** life in **exchange** for them. Yet, that’s what **Christ** did. He died for the **ungodly** - for **sinners** - for those who rightfully **deserved** to be **condemned**. He died for **us!**

Knowing that Jesus has **saved** us from God’s wrath through His own substitutionary death on the **cross** should lead us to be the most **joyful** of all people. Dear friends, let your hearts be **glad** because God has **delivered** us from the guilt and punishment of our **sins**, and has given us an **eternal home** with Him in **heaven**.

Let your hearts be **glad**, and let your gladness **show** itself, through a **smiling** face, a **cheerful** voice, and a **helpful** hand. **Rejoice! God Has Done Much For You.**
Amen.