

## Romans 5:1–11

<sup>1</sup>Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>2</sup> Through him we also have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand. And we rejoice confidently on the basis of our hope for the glory of God. <sup>3</sup> Not only this, but we also rejoice confidently in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces patient endurance, <sup>4</sup> and patient endurance produces tested character, and tested character produces hope. <sup>5</sup> And hope will not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who was given to us. <sup>6</sup> For at the appointed time, while we were still helpless, Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> It is rare indeed that someone will die for a righteous person. Perhaps someone might actually go so far as to die for a person who has been good to him. <sup>8</sup> But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup> Therefore, since we have now been justified by his blood, it is even more certain that we will be saved from God's wrath through him. <sup>10</sup> For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, it is even more certain that, since we have been reconciled, we will be saved by his life. <sup>11</sup> And not only is this so, but we also go on rejoicing confidently in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received this reconciliation.

Sermon for Lent 2, February 28, 2021; St. Paul's Green Garden

Text: Romans 5:1-11

Theme: "The Blessings of Lent Are Amazing"

In the name of Jesus, who has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, dear fellow redeemed,

He could easily have been called a liar, cheater, swindler, and co-conspirator. And I am sure all those names and more came to the mind of his brother and perhaps his father, too. You heard about him earlier today. His name was Jacob. His crimes were against the members of his own family.

Centuries later, some pretty rough characters confront a man by the light of a fire and accuse him of being in league with a known rebel. He gets confused. He didn't expect these accusations. In fear he blurts out curses, and swears he doesn't know the guy they're talking about. Never heard of him. You and I know Peter well from the Bible. His crimes were against his own teacher and Lord—Jesus himself. Ever lie to or cheat a family member? Think back. Ever deny your Lord or act ashamed, or apologize for his teachings? Remember what you did. Remember when.

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Jacob's mother told him to run so his brother wouldn't kill him. Peter was so ashamed he went out and wept bitterly. Where have you and I hidden when we have shamefully sinned against our God?

But when we read Genesis 28 we do not find God treating Jacob as a fugitive or criminal. Instead we hear God making promises to Jacob—the same promises that the Lord had made to Abraham. God blessed him with the promise that he would receive God's mercy and grace through the promised Savior. God loved him and forgave him.

After our very Savior had been crucified on that day so terrible for Peter and the other disciples, the risen Jesus met some of them by the Sea of Galilee. All of them had forsaken him, but he forgave them. Then there was Peter. Who could forgive him? He had been a traitor. But rather than hearing Jesus expel the man from his presence, we hear Jesus forgiving and including in his ministry the very one who had denied him.

While these men never knew a season we call Lent, they knew all about its blessings. When you look back at all of God's activity recorded in Scripture, when we look back at our own lives, everything God has done is wrapped up in Lent and its blessings. When we see that our Lord has treated us who rebel against him, with the same mercy and forgiveness that he has treated sinners throughout the ages, we can only stand in wonder, that the blessings of Lent are so amazing. This is the very theme that Paul wants to burn into our minds today. The blessings of Lent are amazing because they are so abundant, because they are so undeserved, because they are guaranteed.

In our court system, we have a right to expect that when an accused person is proved to have committed a crime, he will be found guilty and a proper sentence will be handed down. And that is exactly the way it works in God's court room, too. But God does something that we would never expect from the holy and righteous judge of the universe. Every sinner is justified. God declares every sinner, 'not guilty.' And far from having to run away and hide, far from putting our face in our hands, hanging our heads in shame and being sentenced, Paul tells us we have peace with God—because Jesus died for us. Don't look back at sin. Don't haul out the record of your wrongs. God will never dredge up those accusations and point the finger of judgment at you--never. Peace with God means friendship not war. Peace with God means we are family members, not outcasts. Peace with God means we can joyfully boast about every one of the abundant blessings of Lent God gives us because Jesus died for us.

Since God gives us a place in his family, he wants us to, and in fact we need to, look at suffering through a very different lens. I now have a new self who

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recognizes God's hand in my life. When I suffer Paul says my new man will joyfully boast because I believe that the God who sent his Son to pay for my sins, has a purpose for allowing me to suffer. In a sense suffering is like a rope that gets wrapped around us. But before it wraps around me, all of it is pulled through God's hand. He will make sure only so much gets wrapped around me and no more, so that it serves his purpose. And what is his purpose for suffering? Paul gives us just one reason and others come from it. He says suffering produces perseverance.

It means that God promises that we are members of his family. Through his unending love for us he gives us the ability to endure and weather the storms of suffering in our lives even in some of the most trying circumstances. And the more we learn how God gives us the ability to endure, the more he produces Christian character or Christ-likeness in our hearts and in our lives. What is Christian character?

Years ago, a small town in Alabama was torn apart by tornadoes. One couple interviewed in had just finished rebuilding their home that had been destroyed in a tornado only ten months earlier. When asked how she felt, the wife was not visibly crying. She was pretty matter of fact when she answered, "We don't know why this happened. God sees the big picture, we don't." What this woman expressed with those words bears out what Paul says next. Character produces hope. And what is hope? It is sure confidence that God will always be with us since he has poured his love into our hearts through Jesus. It is like the kid who can play a ball game, or in a piano recital or do a project for a science fair. He knows he belongs to his parents and his parents love him. Whether he wins the game or gets first place in the piano recital or wins the blue ribbon at the science fair doesn't matter. He is confident; His parents will always love him. These are the amazing, abundant blessings of Lent. We are members of God's family because Jesus fought the battle on the cross and won. Now God pours his love into our hearts and justifies us through his blood. The apostle makes crystal clear that we did not deserve even one of these abundant blessings of Lent.

This becomes so clear when we remember who we are. By nature we can only sin. God correctly said before the flood in Genesis, "Every inclination of man's heart is only evil from childhood." God sees every one of my sins. Now Paul doesn't list a catalog of our sins. He has already made his readers very aware that not one of us can escape the conviction of God's laws against us. All we need to do is look at our own hearts and we see we have not even kept the first commandment. We have all kinds of other things we love more than God. Then we see how we misuse God's name, neglect his word, speak ill of other people—

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and you can go on. But one fact is certain. Every one of my sins is a personal affront against God. Each one is rebellion and defiance of God's law. Why would he not destroy us?

And what is worse, we were stuck. Pity the person who gets caught in a snowstorm out in the middle of nowhere and slides into the median. He is stuck. This poor fellow didn't even think to bring a shovel. With a little elbow grease and a little time he could have shoveled his way out. But he has nothing. He is powerless. We too, were powerless before God, not only because we could do nothing good. Worse, we could not change ourselves. We were enemies of God and we could not change it. The only thing we could do is keep on sinning, keep on living out a life of hatred toward God and each other. We really didn't have any endearing qualities at all. So God changed our situation. **For at the appointed time, while we were still helpless, Christ died for the ungodly.** That, Paul says, was you and me.

The verdict had been rendered. God had passed sentence. We were supposed to die. We were supposed to get everything we deserved—death and damnation. But Paul explains how God changed things: **But God, because he is rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in trespasses. It is by grace you have been saved!** We deserved punishment, but the Bible makes it clear, God sent his Son in our place. This is what grace is. The Father required his Son to accept punishment he didn't deserve so we could receive eternal life which we didn't deserve.

Paul illustrates this. **For at the appointed time, while we were still helpless, Christ died for the ungodly.** <sup>7</sup> **It is rare indeed that someone will die for a righteous person. Perhaps someone might actually go so far as to die for a person who has been good to him.** <sup>8</sup> **But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** Good men and good causes may not be hard to find. But when good men are unfairly accused and sentenced to death, few people if any make a determined effort to die in the place of the righteous man. Likewise, there are many good causes in the world, but few people will sacrifice their lives for the sake of even the best cause. Even in our military there probably are only a handful of instances where a soldier in the middle of an attack has fallen on a grenade to save his platoon. But this is exactly what Jesus did for us. Except our cause was not good. We were his enemies, we hated him. He died for us anyway because he wants us in his family. He wants to spend eternity with the likes of us—not broken, crippled and ravaged by sin. But he gives us the undeserved blessings of the cross, the amazing blessings of Lent.

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We have never deserved them and that is what makes the forgiveness of even ONE sin amazing. But in his most remarkable love, God, because of Jesus' death forgives them all. And he holds himself to such a promise by guaranteeing them to us.

Paul says it again. "**We are justified by his blood.**" The blood of God's son cleanses us from every sin and God hands down a very clear verdict. We are not guilty. That's it. End of discussion. Satan and the evil angels can rage and storm but their anger changes nothing. Even human judges act the same way. We would say a judge is unjust and unfair if the jury brought in a 'not guilty' verdict but the judge turned right around and passed a severe sentence on the person declared 'not guilty.' That kind of judge would surely be relieved of his duties. In the same way our God who declared us innocent of all wrong doing because Jesus gives us his righteousness, will not now bring his anger and punishment raining down on us. Our God who sacrificed his own son to change us from enemies to friends will not now punish us for we are his beloved children.

And remember, God values everything his Son did for us. In fact, everything Jesus did was so precious in God's sight that he raised his Son from the dead. Jesus did not deserve to die. He went to the bitterness of death and hell to make us God's friends and family members. Now that Jesus lives forever, that surely guarantees that Jesus saves us from the Father's anger and punishment. This guarantee of God's mercy forever, is just another of the amazing blessings of Lent.

So even while we walk with Jesus on the road to Calvary's cross and know that our sins put him there, in the end we rejoice in God. We rejoice in the amazing blessings he brought us through Jesus and his suffering. These were blessings that the disciples surely despaired of on Good Friday, but later learned to proclaim clearly so that both Jews and Gentiles can rejoice in God. You and I have every reason to look at God and see in him our dear heavenly Father. Look at God and see the one who loves you and takes care of you. He is the one who sees the big picture and has everything in his care even when we don't understand how it will all work out.

So even when you have days when you feel like Jacob the deceiver or Peter the denier, don't look in the rearview mirror at past sins. Look at the cross of Jesus. And when you look there, remember, there is where Jesus paid for everything. Then take another close look. Jesus is not there. So look ahead. See the amazing blessings of Lent and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Rejoice that because of Lent, you will see with your own eyes the glory of the God who redeemed you because he loves you. Amen.