

A Sermon by  
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Chinese Christian Church  
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# The Benefits of Salvation

ROMANS 5:1-11

The Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans can be divided into two major sections. The first major section (which occupies most of the first two chapters and part of the third chapter) helps the reader to understand his own need. That section can be summed up by saying that all men need the gospel. The second major section of Romans is a description of the gospel that all men need.

It is normal human reaction to be turned off by negative preaching. But the logic found in Romans is that we need the negative in order to appreciate the positive. A certain person will not seek salvation unless that person first becomes aware of the presence of God's wrath in his life. So an increased awareness of the negative should increase our desire to discover a remedy to our problem.

But once the remedy has been found and experienced, there should be a change in the attitude of the person who has gained access by faith into the grace of God. When we experience eternal life our disposition should change.

There is a true story of a certain individual who resided in the poorest section of town, in the most deprived circumstances. The empty cans in her shack indicated that before her death she had been eating mostly pet food. The house contained little furniture. She had almost no clothing.

Her death would not have received the attention of the press except for a startling discovery. Among the meager personal effects in this woman's residence was a bankbook showing a balance in her name of more than \$500,000.

Most of us would think it tragic that any individual would fail to draw upon such a rich resource to provide for herself at least some minimal relief from her abject poverty. Yet many us who profess to be Christian live just as far below the level of spiritual resources that are available to us in Christ.

Too many of us are stumbling along in discouragement and defeat. We are feeding on the ashes of earthly circumstances rather than on the riches of God in Christ Jesus. Why do we go around looking so gloomy? Is it because we have figured out for sure that our circumstances are not going to get any better? And what if they never do get better? Is that a good reason to spend the rest of our lives feeling depressed about life? Are circumstances really that important?

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This week, as I began to meditate on the words recorded in today's scripture reading, I fell under conviction. The theme of rejoicing is strong. The word "rejoice" is found three times. It didn't take long for me to realize that I would be preaching something today that I do not practice enough in my own life. I have been dwelling too much on certain negative circumstances in my life that I am certain will not change in the short run. And focusing too much on those circumstances has robbed me of the joy of my salvation. Now, after meditating on today's scripture lesson, I am once again reminded that the only thing which can provide deep and lasting joy is the salvation given to us by our Father in heaven. Today I want to take a few minutes to review the benefits of our salvation as they are recorded in the fifth chapter of Romans.

ROMANS 5:1-2 says, "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." This statement declares the glorious fact that being justified by faith does make a difference, and the difference is huge.

Before we were justified by faith—before we received eternal life through a new birth in Christ—before that happened, we were God's enemies. We were fighting against God. For years I have been teaching that spiritual warfare begins the moment we receive eternal life and become serious about pursuing holiness. But there is a sense in which warfare on the spiritual level has always been a part of our experience. Prior to surrendering our lives to God, we fought against God. After we surrendered our lives to God, we entered into peace with God and the devil became our new enemy. The peace that is mentioned in ROMANS 5:1 is not a kind of "peace of mind". It is a peace with God. People from all religions can achieve a certain peace of mind through things like meditation and singing songs that raise the spirit. But peace with God means a complete change of status. It means changing from a life where wrath is the primary force that shapes the person I am to a life where grace becomes the primary force that shapes the person who I am. This is what it means to be at peace with God.

A man named Raymond Dibble was the first protestant pastor I ever knew. He was the one who persuaded me to come to New York to study for the ministry. He was also the person who mentored me during my first four years of ministry. Pastor Dibble loved to quote COLOSSIANS 3:1-2. That verse says, "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things." There were plenty of circumstances in Pastor Dibble's life that could have caused him to have a negative disposition, but he was the most positive person I ever met. He knew where he stood. He stood in the grace of God. He had been raised up with Christ in the heavenly places. From that position his mind could dwell on positive heavenly things even in the midst of negative circumstances. And what are some of those heavenly things that will cause the heart to rejoice regardless of circumstances?

The first thing is the glory of God. The last half of ROMANS 5:2 says "We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God." The "glory of God" represents all that we hope to become and are in the process of becoming. 2 CORINTHIANS 3:18 talks about Christians being "transformed into His (God's) likeness with ever increasing glory." Glory stands for everything that is perfect. It stands for a perfect body that is free from sickness and pain and death. PHILIPPIANS 3:21 talks about how God will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body." And glory also stands for a perfect environment, an environment free from sin and the death and crying and pain that result from sin (REVELATIONS 21:4).

The thought of sharing in the glory of God is a cause for rejoicing. It is a hope reserved only for those who have been justified by faith. All the other so called hopes offered by the religions and philosophies of this world are nothing in comparison with the hope of the glory of God. In fact, EPHESIANS 2:12 declares all those without eternal life to be completely without hope.

This is the first positive thing about our salvation that we need to consider. But it's only the beginning. There is more. Certainly it is desirable and even essential to have a hope based on what the Bible teaches. You have heard the saying, "God said it and I believe it

and that's good enough for me." But God knows that human beings actually do need more than the objective truth recorded in the Bible. We need to see the Biblical truths in which we believe worked out in the crucible of life and in the context of suffering. Prior to the suffering, hope is nothing more than an objective reality. It has yet to become an experienced reality. The objective truth is extremely important, because when that truth is mixed with suffering it sets off a chain reaction of events that results in a transformation. The believer's hope, which had been based upon objective reality, changes to into a hope that is now based upon experienced reality.

Being a pastor has given me the privilege of seeing many of God's children pass through periods of tremendous suffering. I have seen the chain reaction of events take place. I have watched people die from painful diseases, and I have witnessed them growing stronger in the process. I have seen them grow stronger in their ability to persevere in their faith, and I have seen them grow stronger in Christian character. I have heard people just days before they die say, "Isn't God so good." I know that some of those people knew that God was good even before their suffering began. The Bible said it, and they had believed it. But, through the suffering, the objective reality became an experienced reality. It began as an objective hope and ended as an experienced hope.

The power given to us at the moment of our salvation is a real power. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is love. And when love begins to take over in our lives, we then have convincing evidence that the hope we originally had is much more than just theory.

The hope of God's glory should cause us to rejoice. Witnessing in our own lives the chain reaction of events that comes about when our objective hope joins up with our personal suffering—this should also cause us to rejoice.

And then, in ROMANS 5:6-11 we have a final reason for rejoicing. In this section of scripture, it is as if the Apostle Paul is saying, "Stand back and consider the enormous and magnificent things God has done in the history of the universe. And then marvel over the fact that you have become a participant in those events."

ROMANS 5:6-7 begins by reminding the reader how God acted at just the perfect time in the history of the universe to demonstrate his love toward people by sending His Son to die for us. The thing that makes the death of Christ so great is the reason why He died. It is human nature to desire to make sacrifices for people that we find attractive. However, to make the ultimate sacrifice of voluntarily dying for a certain person is a rare occurrence within the human race, regardless of how attractive that person is.

But, in contrast to the human reason for sacrifice, we have God's reason. And God's reason has nothing to do with how attractive we are. In fact, there is nothing we can do to make ourselves attractive to God. The reason why God sent His Son to die for us is because we are completely unattractive. There was nothing righteous or good about us. He saw our need. It was while we were still completely unable to make ourselves attractive to God that He died for us. He came to save us by paying the penalty of sin for us and then by forgiving us. Both propitiation and atonement are provided through the death of Jesus Christ.

And then after death came the Resurrection and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. These are also enormous historical events. Pentecost made it possible for people to experience the ongoing power of the resurrected Christ to save. Whereas justification was made possible through Christ's death, sanctification is made possible through Christ's resurrection life poured out in our hearts in the form of the Holy Spirit. There is a big difference between our ability to obey the commands of God before the Holy Spirit comes to permanently reside in our lives and after. Pentecost made it possible for people of faith to experience so much more power than they ever had before to become good and righteous.

These are the enormous and magnificent acts of God that are actual events which have taken place in the history of the universe. These events are far greater than the creation of the universe itself. They are also greater than the Mayflower crossing the Atlantic to come to the New World. And they are more significant than any of the great wars that

have been fought on this planet.

One memory I have as a young child is a memory of a certain classmate telling us that her ancestors had come over on the Mayflower. Somehow that made her feel very special and it also made the rest of us feel that she was a special person. My father fought in the Second World War. His direct connection to that historical event makes him seem very special in the eyes of his grandchildren. Already people who were at ground zero when the events of 9-11 took place seem like very special people in the minds of many.

It is a special thing to have a direct connection to significant historical events. And to be directly connected to the most significant events that have every taken place in the history of the universe is indeed a cause for rejoicing. It is the privilege of a chosen group of people who, when compared to the overall population that has existed throughout history, are almost certain to be in the minority. Romans 5:11 ends this section of scripture by admonishing us to rejoice in the fact that we are directly connected to these enormous historical events. We have been chosen to receive reconciliation.

Remember Mary's story? After being told by the angel that she would give birth to Jesus, the Son of the Most High, she went to tell her relative Elizabeth. Elizabeth said to her, "Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished." At that moment the significance and magnitude of the historical events that were unfolding around her and the fact that she was directly connected to those events overwhelmed Mary. So she responded with a hymn of praise in which she sang, "My soul praises the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."

If only we could somehow learn from Mary's experience! If only we could be overwhelmed by the fact that we have been chosen to be connected to the most significant events that have ever taken place in the history of this universe! If all of us could make that connection, the mood around here would never be the same.

Aren't we very much like the woman who lived as if she had nothing when all the time she had a half million dollars at her disposal? We say that it is hard to change. But why is it hard to change? We have the objective hope of the glory of God recorded in the Bible. Most of us have come to know suffering, and some of us know that the suffering has done what it was meant to do in our lives. And we do have the ability to understand the enormous significance of Christ's death and Resurrection and how we are connected to those events. We have the bankbook in our hands. What stops us from withdrawing even a small portion of what we have? What prevents us from rejoicing in our salvation?

Each of us must individually answer that question. As for me, I am personally challenged. This is Father's Day. It is a day where I am reminded of my responsibility to be a leader to my wife and to my children. I often come home from work tired and discouraged. I have been spending too much time feeding on the ash heap of negative circumstances, circumstances that I am convinced will not change any time soon. So it is time that I change. I need to spend more time and energy dwelling on the things that are above. I need to spend more time rejoicing in my salvation. I owe it to my wife and I owe it to my children.