

Romans 5, Pt. 1

It is good news that God is righteous. The creator and ruler of the world has integrity, and he will judge all things with integrity. As we have studied Romans, we have found that God will establish righteousness through both judgment and mercy. Judgment involves God's vindication of his moral standard and holy will, both in the flow of history and at the end of all things. Mercy is God's forgiving and restoring people in and through Jesus Christ. Because Christ died as an atoning sacrifice (3:25), God can offer life to those who deserve death. God both gives salvation in love and yet maintains his own standard and will. So the Christian discovers two wonderful things - **(1) there is a perfect standard that makes sense out of life; and (2) we can have a meaningful, personal relationship with God**, even though we are imperfect. The way of mercy is for all those who have faith - personal trust - in God.

Just as judgment is already at work in human history, so God's righteousness is already on display in human history. There are two ways in which this righteousness is currently being worked out in history. First, God is preserving the world and preventing people from totally losing his image, through what has been called **common grace**. God has a grace in the world that holds things together. Second, God is actually working righteousness into the lives of **his people**. We will never become morally perfect in this life, and we'll never have reason to boast before God. Nonetheless, God is in the business of transforming his people into the model of Jesus through the ministry of the Spirit. We call this process **sanctification**. It will become a more pressing concern for Paul as we pick up his argument in Romans 5 and beyond.

Romans 5 could easily be divided into two sections. Verses one through eleven give us **personal results of the work of Christ**. Verses twelve through twenty-one give us **a study of salvation history**. My goal today is that we focus on the first eleven verses this morning and pick up the

concluding section next week. Nonetheless, I want to begin by showing you something cool from vv. 17 and 21.

Before we get there, let me ask you a question. Do you feel like you are “reigning” over your life? My hunch is that many of us struggle with the feeling that life is something that happens to us and certainly not something which we can master. One of my seminary professors grew up in a loving but non-religious home in rural England. His parents cared deeply for him and wanted him to have an education though they were very poor. His parents also happened to be committed Marxists who offered their son little in the way of spiritual consolation. By the time, Jerram had reached college years, he had been overcome by the pain of life and began to think that suicide was the only way out. And so one day, he took himself to the edge of a cliff with the full intention of throwing himself off. Life was too overpowering, too uncontrollable, too painful. The only thing that stopped him was the beauty of the landscape that stretched out before him. How could a world that was so beautiful be meaningless in the end? And so he took himself back to his campus. Soon, he met a wonderful group of Christians, and they showed him that there was another way. There was meaning to life, and no one had to give up to that sense of powerlessness.

Listen to what Paul claims in v. 17 - “Since by the one man’s trespass, death reigned [in the past] through that one man, how much more will those who receive the overflow of grace and the gift of righteousness reign [in the future] in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.” **Those who receive the gift of righteousness - in other words, true Christians - will reign in life.**

Verse 21 makes it clear that this reign is not based on our own strength -

“...so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace will reign through righteousness, resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Notice here that it is grace that reigns. Now let us put those two verses together.

God’s grace will reign through righteousness in us, so that we will reign in life. This reign begins to happen right now, and will continue for all of eternity. The Christian, therefore, does not need to give up in the face of the struggles of life because grace is at work in them and, as John Newton wrote, grace will lead them home.

How does this “reign” work out in practice? Now we can return to the first eleven verses. To my mind, the greatest statement shows up right at verse one - “We have **peace with God** through our Lord Jesus Christ.” I think that we can summarize the whole of the Christian life as learning what it means to be at peace with God. Our peace with God makes a real difference in how we live. It explains our ability to now “reign” in life. To have peace with God is to know that God is not at war with you. Yes, he takes sin seriously. Yes, he offers us discipline and correction. But he is a loving Father who knows what is best for us. Life takes on a different tone when the ultimate relationship is settled. We don’t have to strive for acceptance or manipulate other people because we have peace with God.

We also have **access to God** (v. 2). Our reign is not about the exertion of our own strength but about bringing the situations and people around us under the umbrella of God’s love and power through prayer. The Christian **rejoices in hope** (v. 2). We know that God will bring us to eternal life in the end, yet we also expect God to show up and make his presence known in our lives right now. It makes a difference if you know that God is going to be with you in that doctor’s office or when the bill for car repair comes in. The Christian also reigns in this life because she **rejoices in afflictions** (v. 3). If you know that you have peace with God, then you also know that the hardships and struggles of life are not God’s attempt to get back at you or hurt you. All of a sudden you are open to the possibility that God might even have good gifts available to you in your afflictions. Verses three and four make it clear that the gifts of affliction include both **character** and **hope**.

And what is it that seals all of this home to the Christian’s heart? The answer is found in verse five - “God’s love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit.” The full picture of salvation is not just being covered in the righteousness of Christ. It is also **being indwelt by the Spirit of God**. God the Spirit works righteousness into our lives through his presence inside of us. This is the real reason why we can grow during seasons of hardship - because the Holy Spirit can turn the challenges into opportunities. It is the Holy Spirit who constantly reminds us that we have peace with God.

Maybe all of this is just too good to be true. Paul seems to anticipate this objection, by reminding the Romans in the next several verses of what God

had already done for them. When we were helpless, Jesus died for the ungodly. While we were sinners, Christ died for us. We have already been declared righteous through his blood. When we were enemies - not basically good people who make mistakes, but enemies - we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son. All this has already happened. Consequently, we can know with assurance that we will reign in the present and enjoy eternity with Jesus forever. **Why would the one who has already given us Jesus hold anything back from us now?** We will be saved through Jesus from the coming wrath (v. 9). We will be saved by his life (v. 10). We now rejoice in God because we have a reconciled relationship with him in Christ (v. 11). We really can reign in this life through God's grace at work in us.

Jerram discovered that there is meaning in this life, that **everything can be changed through a meaningful, personal relationship with God**. Millions of people throughout history have discovered the same thing. I discovered this when I was a young teenager. God saved me from despair and heartbreak, drawing me into fellowship with himself even as my family was breaking apart. Some of you were led to this meaningful relationship by reading a book which scared you to Jesus. Others of you were brought up in this very church and discovered God's grace and power at work in your heart from your earliest memories. No one has to leave here today not knowing if they truly have peace with God. All that is necessary is that you come in faith, or personal trust, turning from sin in order to rest wholly in Jesus. How do you do this? Paul gives us a picture in chapter ten. "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation" (10:9-10). Anyone who does this can leave here today with assurance and peace.