

STANDING IN HOPE

Introduction

1. Some people believe that theology is dry and tedious and not very interesting – and please, no theology in a sermon! I suppose that is possible to feel that way, but if that is true, it probably has more to do with the way it is presented than with the truth that it represents. Think about what theology is – essentially, it is the study of God and His will as He is revealed in His Word! Could there be any subject more fascinating? And consider what we have been learning.
2. Can you think of anything more incredible than the theological truth that we who were sinners and condemned to certain judgment, could be justified by faith – declared righteous by God, because of the all-sufficient, sacrificial, substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus on our behalf? And the results of that declared righteousness not only means that we have been spared from certain judgment, but it also means that we have real access into the very presence of God. And further, the enmity that once existed between God and us is now and forever gone and God welcomes us into His presence in peace and even calls us into His presence to worship Him? Did you get that? He now welcomes us into His very presence – in peace! How could that be dry or uninteresting?
3. If we even understand a fraction of this truth, surely we could not possibly consider it with just a nod or a yawn or even a somewhat disinterested acknowledgment! Resonating from our innermost being should be appropriate praise and worship and gratefulness for such an incredible and unexpected gift – a gift that will impact us for all eternity!
4. The separation that occurred between the first human couple and God – a separation that was passed on to every generation since, has been for those who have been justified by faith, completely done away with. We now have peace with God and access into His grace – a grace that allows us to stand before Him!
5. That is theology – and it is good! And we need to look at that just a bit more closely today. But we also need to understand something else. Generally speaking, the theology that we are to know is also truth that is supposed to be applied. To say it

another way, that which we believe is usually field tested to see if we really do believe it. And it is God who applies the field test. That is what we have here. Let's get into it and see where it leads us.

I. THEOLOGICAL AFFIRMATION – REJOICE IN HOPE OF THE GLORY OF GOD (1-2)

A. Why we rejoice in hope – the substance of that joy

1. Paul has set the foundation of this joy in the first four chapters and summarizes them here in chapter 5:1-2. "Therefore..." sets the stage for the summary. "Since we have been justified by faith." Is there anything sweeter than hearing that about yourself? Don't let that pass too quickly by your ears before it has had some time to sink into your brain.
2. Paul tells us, if we are justified, then we are free from the wrath of God. Actually he will have more to say in the chapters that follow about this incredible position we find ourselves. In Romans 6 he will tell us that if we are justified, we are freed from the dominion of sin. Consider that! In Romans 7 he will tell us if we are justified, we are free from the domination and condemnation of the law. In Romans 8 he will tell us that if we are justified, we are freed from the curse of death. So Paul will walk us through these wonderful benefits that God has packaged for us in Jesus Christ – all of that resulting from having been justified by faith.
3. But here, for now, Paul says that since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God and we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and that leads us to great joy, a rejoicing in hope of the glory of God. Does that make sense to you why we are to rejoice? But what do those things mean?

B. What rejoicing in hope is – the definition of that joy

1. Justification by faith – I think we get this, but I want to make sure. It is a legal declaration of "not guilty." It comes from God, based on the death of Christ in our place, completely granted to us by God's grace, and applied to us by faith. Justification results in us having a right standing before God. Prior to this we were not acceptable to God and in fact to approach Him would have resulted in death and judgment. But now we may approach Him without fear of judgment and we will not die, but rather we will be welcomed into His presence! That is justification by faith! Does that make you rejoice? It should!

2. Peace with God – The Bible teaches that people are naturally and universally at enmity with God. We are His enemies. Paul makes that very clear in Ephesians 2. We have committed high treason against Him and no matter what we might say about God or feel about God, we are His enemy unless and until He intervenes in our lives. But when He does regenerate us, we are forgiven and we are cleansed and we are changed and we are no longer enemies, but we are children of God and beloved of God. Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God!
3. Access by faith into grace – When we are humbled before God, He grants us grace – grace to save us and grace to keep us saved and grace to live for Him now. Access to this grace is also by faith. It was by faith that we were justified and it is by faith that we receive what we need to live a kind of life we have been called and saved to live. The author of Hebrews wrote, “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in the time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). “Access by faith into this grace, in which we stand!”
4. Hope of the glory of God – The glory of God is everywhere in His creation, but the primary place where we see the glory of God, the best place to see it, is in the gospel story of Jesus’ life and death and resurrection for us. Paul describes it as, “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4). So the glory of Christ that we see in the gospel story is the glory of God. In other words, His glory shines through the gospel. When we see the gospel for what it is, we see the glory of God, recognizing its immeasurable worth. Nothing is more to be desired than the glory of God. That is why Paul could say in Romans 8:18, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” Practically speaking then, no pain or trial or problem or difficulty or challenge would be too great to endure if it brought us to the glory of God. Paul wrote in Romans 8:21, “...the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” I take that to mean that we are going to share in the glory of God. In fact, we ourselves will be glorified. In the midst of Paul’s sufferings he said that this “momentary, light affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.” According to Romans 9:23 the final goal of all creation, judgment, and salvation is this: “...to

make known the riches of His glory for vessels of mercy, which He has prepared beforehand for glory." We were made to enjoy the riches of the glory of God. Paul, who perhaps tasted more of this glory than anyone, said, "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:8). And what do we gain when we gain Christ? According to 2 Thessalonians 2:14: "To this He called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." And that is the glory of God (2 Corinthians 4:4,6). Do you understand why Paul would say, "We rejoice in hope of the glory of God"? That is the theology. What does that look like in real life?

II. THEOLOGICAL APPLICATION – REJOICE IN SUFFERINGS – THE PURPOSE OF GOD (3-5)

A. The call to rejoice in suffering

1. We first need to consider what Paul means by suffering. Does he only mean that which we suffer for doing God's will (such as getting beat up for sharing our faith, or some other such "persecution")? I think he has a broader perspective in mind. Virtually every affliction in the Christian life could be a test to our faith. In the words of John Piper, "They (these sufferings) could be tribulations from loss of health, or tribulations in broken or strained relationships, or tribulations in vocational hardships and disappointments, or tribulations in accidents or natural disasters, or tribulations in verbal or physical assaults, or simply everyday inconveniences from traffic jams to plumbing problems. Anything that makes life harder and threatens (our) faith in the goodness and power and wisdom of God is tribulation." (Piper, sermon Nov. 14, 1999). I agree.
2. Having said that, we all acknowledge that life is filled with tribulations, with sufferings, with problems. What is astonishing is what Paul says in verse 3 regarding those problems! "Rejoice in them." And perhaps equally amazing is that that is exactly what Paul does here and what he did throughout his ministry!
3. How did he do it and on what basis does he call us to do it? The answer comes from v. 2. We are standing in grace. God releases His omnipotent power to help us through the sufferings. As we endure, He pours out His grace. In other words, the power to rejoice and exalt in tribulation comes from God's grace that we receive by trusting in His promises. And what is it that happens as we endure these trials?

B. The surprising accompaniments in suffering

1. Perseverance – Let's suppose that something happens in your life that is hard and painful and frustrating and disappointing (that's not hard to suppose, is it?) And as you are in the midst of that, God gives you His grace. And in that grace your faith looks to Christ and to His power and His sufficiency and His fellowship and His wisdom and His love, and you see that – all by grace. And because you see that and stand in that, you will not give in to bitterness or resentment or complaining, but rather you will rejoice. Why? Not because you just love the hurt! You rejoice because you have become the recipient of all of those things I just mentioned! In the affliction you have looked to Christ and received from Him all He desires to give to His children. You have received His abundant, amazing grace! And thus your faith endures and perseveres. It becomes stronger. How is it stronger? It is tempered. (When I was in middle school, it was required for all 7th grade boys to take metal shop. I made a center punch on a lathe. After I was almost done, the teacher heat-treated my project. He put it in the fire and got it red hot. Was it so poorly made that he was trying to burn it up? No – I don't think that was his purpose. The purpose was to make the tip harder than it would have been without the flames. If it was harder, stronger, it would hold the point when it was hammered against metal). Perseverance! Endurance! The trials of life keep you from losing your usefulness. They keep you sharp so you can endure and actually make a difference. That is a good thing. You can rejoice in that.
2. Proven character – perseverance demonstrates authenticity. People who go through trials often crumble. We have seen that. When they don't, we say, "That person had the right stuff. There is man or a woman of character." We say that because their character was tested in the trial and their perseverance demonstrated their authenticity. They proved themselves to be the real deal. That is what the trials of life do for us. They prove that we stand in the grace of God! They prove that we belong to Him! They not only prove it to us but also to others who see us! That is a good thing. You can rejoice in that!
3. Hope - So God takes us through hard times to temper the steel of our faith and show us that we are real, authentic, genuine, proven people who belong to Him. And that gives us hope that we really will inherit the glory of God and not come

into judgment. In other words, one of the great obstacles to a full and strong hope in the glory of God is the fear that we are hypocrites - that our faith is not real and that we just inherited it from our parents and have been motivated by things that are not honoring to God. One of the purposes of the afflictions is to give us victory over those fears that we don't belong to Christ, and to make us full of hope and confidence that we truly are the children of God. So we endure and that proves our character and that increases our hope. That is a good thing. You can rejoice in that!

4. Without disappointment (shame) – Here, Paul simply makes the point that our hope, which is rooted in the genuineness of our proven faith, will not disappoint us. We can know this because the Holy Spirit has come into our lives and has begun to pour the love of God experientially into our hearts. And the Holy Spirit who does this was actually given to us! Isn't that incredible. God gave us His Holy Spirit. That's right. He gave us the Spirit! We are probably most aware of the Spirit's work in us when we are going through the challenges of life! That is a good thing. You can rejoice in that!

Conclusion

1. So today we have the theological truth of what results from having been justified by faith. We also have the field test of trials and sufferings and irritations and hurts and disappointments – all designed by a gracious God who wants us to learn to rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Only those who have been justified by faith in this great God can pass the test.
2. But those who have been justified by faith ought to pass the test. We don't all pass, but we ought to because God has given us all we need so that we can rejoice in hope of the glory of God. If we, as justified people, are failing, it is because we are not accessing by faith His sufficient grace.
3. We can proclaim all day long, "God's grace is sufficient for all my needs", but if we are wallowing in the sufferings of life and failing to see and rejoice in hope of the glory of God, what we claim to believe is of little value. The problem is not now nor ever has been with God. It has been and continues to be a problem with me. The Spirit has been given and God's love has been poured out and we have access into His grace. I think that is enough for us to rejoice!

