



Sermon Transcript November 1, 2020

The Gospel Confident Joy! Romans 5:1-11



This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on November 1, 2020 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio and video version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com.

Sermon Text
Romans 5:1-11

¹ Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹ More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Introduction

I love the story of *Les Misérables*, affectionately known to many as “Les Miz.” Victor Hugo’s masterful story revolves around the life of a man by the name Jean Valjean. Valjean was sentenced to five years in prison for stealing a loaf of bread. He committed this crime to provide for his starving family. Upon his release from prison, the number 24601 was branded onto his left shoulder, making it difficult for him to find a normal job. He was permanently branded a criminal.

The pivotal scene in this story took place in the home of a kindly and modest bishop by the name of Monseigneur Bienvenu. His name meant “welcome.” Having no place to stay after being released from prison, the bishop welcomed Valjean into his home and gave him a place to sleep and food to eat. The bishop was a rather humble man, a man of little means; the only valuables in his possession were some silver cutlery and two large silver candlesticks passed down to him from his family. At night, while the house was sleeping, Valjean quietly stole the precious cutlery and slipped out into the night.

The next morning, three policemen arrived at the bishop’s house with the thief and his goods in tow. They were holding Valjean by the collar. He was rather sullen and dejected as he stood in front of the kindly bishop. As soon as the bishop saw who it was standing at the door, he quickly approached the door and said, “Ah, there you are!” he said, looking at Jean Valjean. “I am glad to see you. But I gave you the candlesticks, too, which are silver like the rest and would bring two hundred francs. Why didn’t you take them along with your cutlery?” Hugo then writes, “Jean Valjean opened his eyes and looked at the bishop with an expression no human tongue could describe.” The bishop went on to instruct Valjean to use this silver to become an honest man. The rest of the story finds Valjean to be a changed man, one who tries to help the destitute and oppose evil in the surrounding society, whatever the cost.

If you were the bishop, how would you have reacted had Jean Valjean been standing in your doorway with three policemen after stealing your precious valuables? Be honest. It sure makes for a nice story, but it seems rather unnatural for the bishop to willingly give of these valuables to this scoundrel who trampled on the kindness demonstrated to him the night before. Grace is rather unnatural. Yet, as unnatural as grace may seem, it is absolutely vital to our relationship with God.

I wonder who you most identify with in this story. What side of the door do you read this story from? Do you see yourself looking at this story from the side of the bishop or

the side of Jean Valjean? How you answer this question may give you insight as to how you view yourself. Do you see yourself more as the offended or the offender? Do you see yourself as the one who holds all the cards in your hand or as the one who is in need of unnatural grace? I think we tend to read this story from the wrong side of the door. I think we see ourselves standing more in the shoes of the bishop than in the shoes of the criminal. But as I read the book of Romans, I find that I am Jean Valjean, standing in the need of unnatural grace. Like Valjean, I am at the mercy of the bishop. He can throw the book at me or lavish me with grace. So it is with God. God can throw the book at me or lavish me with grace.

If there is one thing we have seen to this point in Romans, it is this. We do not deserve the kindness and the goodness of God to be extended to us. Romans 1-3 tells us that we are sinful and that we have rebelled against our Creator. Just as the bishop was kind to Valjean by giving him shelter for the night and food to eat, God our Creator was good and kind to us in all that He gave us. Yet, we rebelled against God, raising our fist in defiance of our good God. Therefore, God has given us over to our own desires and we have made a mess of our lives and our world. We live under the just wrath of God and we are destined to die and then face judgment. God has every right, as a holy and righteous God, to condemn us and throw the book at us.

But here is the good news. As we stand in that doorway, caught in our sin, God says to us with great joy, “Ah, there you are!” Have you not heard what I have done for you? I have made a way for you to be made right with me. I sent my son, Jesus Christ, who fully obeyed my law for you and then He died on the cross for you to pay for your sin. And all you have to do is accept “those silver candlesticks” by faith and you will be forgiven. In other words, it is by God’s grace, His unmerited favor, that you are made right with God.

Is it any wonder that the prevailing mood of Romans 5:1-11 is joy? Three times in these eleven verses we find the word *rejoice*. In verse 2, Paul says that *we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God*. In verse 3, he says *we rejoice in our sufferings*. And in verse 11 he says that *we also rejoice in God*. In other words, when we take in the meaning of God’s grace, like Valjean, we find ourselves “standing in the doorway with an expression no human tongue could describe.”

I want to ponder God’s grace this morning by looking at the three verses where Paul describes our response to God’s grace: *we rejoice*. Each time Paul says that *we rejoice* he is describing something that God does for us. In one of these instances he

describes something God did for us in the past. In another instance, he describes something God will do for us in the future. And then, the remaining reference describes what God is doing for us in the present. I heard a joke this week that went like this: “The past, the present and the future walked into a bar; it was tense.” But that is not what we find in our passage this morning. Here is what we find with God’s grace. “When the past, the future and the present of God’s grace walks into your life; it is confident joy!”

God’s Grace: Anchored in the Past

The first thing that causes us to rejoice in God’s grace is something God has done in the past. God’s grace is anchored in something Jesus has already done in the past. Up to this point in our journey through Romans, we have made much of the cross, an event that has taken place in the past. We saw two weeks ago that the righteousness of God is revealed to us in Christ and the cross. In fact, our passage this morning speaks to the importance of the cross. In verse 6 we read, *at the right time Christ died for the ungodly*. In verse 8 we read, *while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*. The next two verses tell us that we have *been justified by his blood* and that *we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son*. The cross is something that God has done “in the past” in order to extend his grace to us. But the cross is only one half of the coin. Three days later, Jesus rose from the dead. “It is Friday . . . but Sunday is coming.” It is the resurrection of Jesus that serves as the anchor of our joy. This is what God has done in the past that enables us to rejoice in his grace.

Paul alludes to the resurrection of Jesus in verse 10. After affirming that we are reconciled to God through the death of Jesus, Paul adds *much more . . . shall we be saved by his life*. He is speaking about the resurrection of Jesus here. The resurrection is vital to our salvation. In our evangelical circles, we like to talk about “being saved.” What we usually mean by that is how we came to faith in Jesus. Our testimony will often begin with something like this: “I was saved when . . .” and then we tell our story of conversion. But notice here it says that *we shall be saved*. So here he is referring to that future day of judgment, or as verse 9 says, *much more shall we be saved by him [Jesus] from the wrath of God*. That is God’s grace extended to us through Jesus. We deserved judgment, but because of the death and the resurrection of Jesus—an event anchored in the past—we receive God’s grace when we turn to Jesus in faith.

There is no good news in the gospel without the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. John Stott said, “Christianity is in its very essence a resurrection religion. The concept of resurrection lies at its heart. If you remove it, Christianity is destroyed.”¹ Adrian



Warnock took this to heart and came up with this concise definition of what it means to be a Christian. If someone says to you, “what is a Christian? - I think this is a good answer. “A Christian is someone who believes in the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ and lives in light of the implications of that event.”²

One of the implications of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is that it tells us that Jesus is Lord. He is God. He is worthy of our worship. Paul says in verse 11 that this is the anchor of our joy. He says, *“More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Our joy is anchored in a person, Jesus. In Romans 4:24 Paul refers to Jesus being raised from the dead and then he says of Jesus, *“our Lord.”* It reminds me of Romans 10:9—often referred to as the end of the Romans Road that explains salvation. Here Paul says, *“if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”* Here you see the essential nature of the resurrection and the implication it makes about Jesus. The risen Jesus is Lord. And so Paul says that it is Jesus and what he has done in the past that is the source of our joy.

Now let me tell you something about that word *rejoice* that you don’t pick up in English. It is not a word that simply expresses “happiness.” It is a much stronger word than that. In fact, you can translate this word with the English word *boast*. *“We also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

When someone boasts or brags they are expressing confidence, usually in themselves. We are appropriately encouraged not to brag or boast in ourselves. Paul already said in Romans 3:27 that when it comes to our standing before God, we have nothing to boast in of ourselves. He asks here, *“Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded.”* In other words, we have no confidence in our flesh, in our good works to make us right before God. It has already been made abundantly clear to us that *None is righteous, no, not one.* But as Jeremiah the prophet says, *“but let him who boasts, boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD.”* That is what Paul is referring to when he uses the word *rejoice* in our passage. It is a confident joy because God’s grace and his forgiveness is certain and sure. How do I know? How do I know as I stand there at the door, caught red handed that God is not going to through the book at me? How do I know that I have been *saved from the wrath of God?* How can I be certain that God lavishes his love and grace on me? My certainty is anchored in what has happened in the past. Jesus was crucified on the cross for our sin, but three days later, he rose from the dead and conquered sin and death. And so *we rejoice [with great confidence] in God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

God's Grace: Focused on the Future

At the beginning of our passage, Paul is describing for us the benefits that come to us once *we have been justified by faith*—that act of grace that makes us right with God. In the first two verses he lists three benefits of being made right with God. We have peace with God. We have access to God's grace. And then, once again we find that word *rejoice*. And it is here that we learn that God's grace is focused on the future. *We rejoice in hope of the glory of God.* God's grace is focused on the future.

We have hope. Often, when we use the word "hope" in everyday language, it conveys the idea of uncertainty. For example, you might say, "I hope it doesn't rain tomorrow." Or you hope the person you are voting for on Tuesday wins the election. Now you don't know whether or not what you are hoping for will come to be, but your hope expresses what you wish to happen. That is not what the word "hope" means in the Bible. Paul links the word *hope* with the word *rejoice*. Don't forget that this word *rejoice* has a ring of confidence to it. This is something you can *boast* in because it is certain and sure. So when the New Testament talks about *the hope of the glory of God* it is talking about the certainty of eternal life and all that goes with it. God's grace causes us to turn our focus to a certain future, our glorious hope.

I love what Paul says about God's love for us in this passage. He says in verse 5 that *God's love has been poured into our hearts*. The idea here is that God's love towards us is extravagant and excessive. He doesn't just share with us the cutlery, he gives us the candlesticks as well. This is what causes John to say in 1 John 3, "*See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God . . . we know that when he appears, we shall be like him.*" All that has been given to Jesus is shared with us. Paul gets into this in Romans 8 when he says that we are *fellow heirs with Christ*. In 1 Corinthians 2:9 Paul says, "*No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.*" Jonathan Edwards said it this way, "There is scarce anything that can be conceived or expressed about the degree of the happiness of the saints in heaven."³

I like how Paul expresses our future hope in our passage this morning. He refers to it as the *hope of the glory of God*. The main attraction of heaven is God himself. We shall see God in all of his wonder and glory. Joni Eareckson Tada said that this is the very thing "that stoked the fire in the bones" of the New Testament writers. They were eagerly waiting for the Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. She said of the New Testament writers, "They likened themselves to soldiers poised on the watchtower, workers hoeing

for the harvest, athletes straining towards the finish line, and virgins waiting and watching at night, lamps trimmed, hearts afire, and eyes scanning the horizon for someone special.”⁴ Our hope is not a “what” but a “who.” It is Jesus.

C. S. Lewis told the story of a woman who, after she was thrown into a dungeon, bore and reared a son. The child grew up seeing nothing but the dungeon walls, straw on the floor and a little patch of sky through the grating above. His mother, an artist, tried to teach her son about the outside world by sketching for him pictures of fields, rivers, mountains and cities. The boy did his best to believe his mother that the outside world was far more interesting and glorious than her drawings. “What?” asked the boy, “No pencil marks out there?” His whole notion of the outer world became blank, for the pencil lines were not part of the real world. The boy believed that the real world was somehow less visible than his mother’s pictures. But really, the world outside lacked lines because it was incomparably more visible. Lewis concluded, “So with us. Our natural experiences are only like penciled lines on flat paper. If they vanish in the risen life, they will vanish only as penciled lines vanish from the real landscape.”⁵ Words cannot do heaven justice.

This is the future hope that comes to us by God’s grace through Jesus. God’s grace causes us to focus on the future. *We rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*

God’s Grace: Experienced in the Present

God’s grace is anchored in the past. Jesus rose from the dead. God’s grace is focused on the future. We have a future hope that is certain. Which brings us to the third cause for joy this morning. God’s grace is experienced in the present. Notice how Paul says in verse 2 that *we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand.* Grace is not just something we receive at the beginning of journey of faith. Grace is a state in which we continue to live. Douglas Moo says it this way, “God’s free giving to us does not stop when we become Christians. It continues to be poured out on us so much that we can be said to live in a constant state of grace.”⁶ This constant state of grace is what enables us to *rejoice*—to boast—in our sufferings.

Suffering is a part of life in this broken and fallen world. Often when we go through suffering we are tempted to get “philosophical” and ask the question, “why?” “Why am I suffering like this?” And for some it even creates a crisis of faith because you wonder why God would allow you to suffer in this particular way. But Paul doesn’t get philosophical here. Instead, he keeps it real and he reminds that God grace is very

present and very close and very much at work in our lives when we suffer. That is why we can *rejoice in our sufferings*. As hard as it may be, suffering does something in us.

For starters, our *suffering produces endurance*. This is a word that refers to single-mindedness. It causes us to focus on what is really important. It causes us to rely on God. I wish it weren't that way. I don't like going through hard times. But often that is what it takes to cause me to put my focus where it needs to be. This past June, Tim Keller announced that he had pancreatic cancer. He gave an encouraging update on his health in August, the tumors had shrunk. His ongoing battle with cancer has driven he and his wife Kathy, "to seek God's face as we never [have] before. He added, "God is giving us more of his sensed presence, more freedom from our besetting sins, more dependence on his Word — things that we had sought for years, but only under these circumstances are we finding them."⁷

Endurance produces character, Paul adds. There is a "testedness" that is on display when you walk through your trial with faith. It doesn't mean that you don't have your moments. But God in his grace sustains you through that and when you come through it your faith is stronger. One of the blessings I have as a pastor is coming alongside people of faith as you walk through your trials. So often when I go to encourage the one who is suffering, I leave encouraged by the faith that is on display in your suffering. It was just over three weeks ago that I sat with Doris Javier in her ICU room. She sitting up, but very weak. And there on the table in front of her beside her food was he rather large and well worn Bible. She patted it several times as she spoke about her undying faith and trust in Jesus. There was a "testedness" to her faith that was proving to be genuine. It was a testament to God's present grace in her life.

And all of this is what produces *hope*. Joni Eareckson Tada observes that so many times we boil the Christian life down to a formula. "Do A, B, or C and you will know God better." She said that the only problem with that is that relationships don't work like that. But she noted that often it is shared suffering that forms intimacy. "When you are in the trenches, handing bullets to your buddy and fighting a common enemy, heart's can't help but be pressed together."⁸ So it is with God. That is why we read in Scripture these verses:

"It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees." (Psalm 119:71)

"For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all." (2 Corinthians 4:17)

“For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” (Jeremiah 29:11) Keep in mind, this promise was made to a people who were in exile and were suffering.

“Blessed is the man you discipline, O LORD, the man you teach from your law; you grant him relief from days of trouble.” (Psalm 94:12-13)

And of course, our passage this morning adds: *“Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”*

Conclusion

What is my hope for you this morning? I hope you see the multi-faceted nature of God’s grace. There is a lot more to those “silver candlesticks” than what you may have seen in the past. I hope you are found standing in the doorway “with an expression no human tongue can describe.” We have often put the adjective “amazing” in front of the word grace without even pausing to consider how “amazing” God’s grace really is. It is our joy. It is our boast. How so?

God’s grace is anchored in the past. Jesus rose from the dead and he is Lord. Therefore all of this is certain and sure.

God’s grace is focused on the future. *We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.* Someday, our faith will be sight and no words can adequately describe what God has in store for us. Truly he has lavished his love on us.

God’s grace is experienced in the present. God’s grace is our constant companion and it accompanies us through the hard things of life. And though I may not be able to answer the “why” question. I can be certain that God is at work. It is his work of grace.

¹John Stott, cited in Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears *Vintage Jesus* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007) 131

²Adrian Warnock *Raised with Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010) 19

³Dr. John H. Gerstner *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Orlando: Berea Publications, Ligonier Ministries, 1993) 543

⁴Joni Eareckson Tada and Steven Estes *When God Weeps* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997) 203

⁵C. S. Lewis *The Inspirational Writings of C. S. Lewis* (New York: Inspirational Press, 1991) 363

⁶Douglas Moo *Romans: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000) 170

⁷Tre Goins Phillips “The Report is Very Encouraging: Pastor Tim Keller Shares Cancer Update”
www1.cbn.com August, 28, 2020

⁸Tada and Estes, 129

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COMMUNITY GROUPS

○ Getting To Know Me Questions

1. There is a lot going on in the world. There is a second wave to the pandemic and the Presidential election has a lot of people concerned. What does it look like to trust God and to love others during a time like this?
2. In light of the things listed above, how should we pray? Spend time praying.

○ Diving Into The Word

3. Read Romans 5:1-11
What do you learn about suffering in this passage? Is there an area of suffering or disappointment in your life which you are seeing as punishment from God, instead of God working to bring you closer to him?

Does anything make you doubt you will reach glory? If so, what—and how will these verses encourage you?

Where, other than God, are you tempted to seek joy. What do you need to remind yourself about God in order to rejoice in him instead?

How does this refrain produce a spirit of rejoicing in your heart?
Well may the Accuser roar of sins that I have done:
I know them all; and thousands more: Jehovah knoweth none!

○ Taking It Home

4. What is one thing you are taking from your study?
5. As a group pray for people you would like to see turn in faith to Jesus.