

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

(October 28, 2012)

Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Romans – Jesus’ Gospel Sets You Free!

Two Gifts that Change Everything

(Romans 5:1-11)

Study #8

Introduction: Things that change everything...

How many times have you heard someone say, recently, “*Well THAT changes everything!*”

No doubt the saying is over used. But when it is well placed, we use the phrase to refer to some event that is forecast or to a just-invented invention.

On the positive side, the Scientific American magazine tells us that nuclear fusion¹ and room temperature superconductors² would change everything in terms of energy supply.

When it comes to disruption, a really huge middle-of-the-Pacific Ocean earthquake, a global pandemic, or a collision with a large meteor would change everything.

Truth be told, lots of things change everything about some things.

- The Model T changed transportation’s “everything.”
- The World Wide Web changed everything about communication.

¹ “Fusion” as opposed to nuclear “fission,” the process in bombs and in current nuclear power plants.

² Such a material would make it much more cost effective to bring solar power and wind power from remote areas to the power grid.

- Firearms changed everything about warfare.
- The light bulb changed everything about, well, reading at night.

This morning we are going to see two “everything changers” from the Bible; two gifts from God that change us and the way we see life; two realities that give life meaning and purpose NOW.

Today we turn to Romans 5, and the opening phrase connects us to all that Paul has already said with, “*Therefore...*”

And what has proceeded has been a stunning look at the Gospel of Jesus. We have looked at our sin and His sacrifice; our condemnation and His salvation; our depravity and His grace.

And after covering all of that, Paul makes an assumption about us, who are reading his letter.

HOPE in Jesus Changes Everything (5:1-5)

Justification INTRODUCES Us to Hope (vv.1-2)

Our present story, in Jesus (v. 1)

When you place your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, trusting that His death on the cross cleanses you of your sin, God declares you justified - SAVED - and gives you eternal life.

And Paul assumes that we who are reading have believed the Gospel and are, therefore, justified children of God. That’s why he can confidently write, *[1b] There having been justified by faith we³ have peace with God⁴ through our Lord Jesus Christ*

Prior to being justified, we were at war with God. Now, the warfare has ended. And it is a wonderful thing when war is ended.

³ You’ll notice that Paul wrote this entire section is in the first person plural, as contrasted with the first four chapters, which are primarily in the third person.

⁴ “Peace with God” is not the same thing as “the peace of God”, which is a subjective experience.

Back in 1945, our nation celebrated the end of hostilities in the European and Pacific theatres that signaled the end of World War II. Celebrations burst out all over.

When you believed in Jesus, your warfare with God ended. You entered into a relationship with the God who was formerly your enemy.

Of course, God didn't have to do it that way.

Today, in a court of law, a judge might declare a defendant innocent, but not be interested in grabbing a cup of coffee with him.

God could have justified you - declared you righteous, forgiven your sins - and then left you on your own.

But, that is not what He did. After He justified you, He called you His child and His friend.

He tore down the wall of hostility that was between you and Him, adopted you into His family, and gave you a gift that changes everything: HOPE.

Our future GLORY, in Jesus (v. 2)

[2] through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult⁵ in hope of the glory of God.

Paul speaks here of ***“exultation.”***

So where, in our culture, do we see people exulting in something? Exultation is usually reserved for High School football, Spurs games, politics, or the delivery room.

Paul wants us to see *exult* as a church word and he tells us here what it is we should be exulting about. Ready? OK.

⁵ The word translated “exult” three times in this passage (Greek *kauxomai*) is frequently translated “boast” in the New Testament.

Right now, you and I are pilgrims. We are marching through life on earth - but we keep an eye on the sky because this world is not our home. Not really. We're just passing through and we have a hope beyond this life.

We EXULT at the thought of what we have waiting for us on the other side because it is going to be GREAT!

Forget what you've heard about sitting on clouds and being bored in Heaven after this life is over.

If Scripture assures us of anything, it assures us that the life after this one is richer, fuller, more joyful, more meaningful, and more filled with God than we could possibly imagine!⁶

And we are especially prone to exult in hope of the glory of God we will experience THEN when we honestly reflect on our tribulations NOW.

Life Experiences STRENGTHEN Hope. (vv. 3-5)

[3] And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; [4] and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope⁷

Our tribulations... (v. 3a)

When Paul mentions “tribulations” we all understand what he's driving at because anyone old enough to understand this sentence has enough acquaintance with life to have experienced tribulations.

They are the hardships of life, ranging from getting out of bed on a bitter cold morning like today (☺), to dealing with cars that won't run, to hearing a really scary doctor's report that makes you sick.

⁶ Check out Randy Alcorn's wonderful book, Heaven, for a very fine treatment of the life after this life for the believer.

⁷ Hope may be expressed with other words - dream, desire, expectation, longing, aspiration. Mark Twain once expressed hope with the comment, “*You don't know quite what it is you do want, but it just fairly makes your heart ache you want it so.*”

Lumped under the theme of tribulations, too, are relationships that get strained, the phone call that begins, “*Are you sitting down?*” and the comment from your spouse that sends you reeling.

Paul would also want us to think about the more blatant persecutions we might experience as Christians.

In a couple of weeks we will observe the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church and will watch a very stirring clip from a DVD that tells the story of a man who has endured much suffering for Jesus. If most of us know little of this kind of tribulation, it was a variety with which Paul was intimately familiar.⁸

And you have tribulation in your life as well.

We all know enough of tribulation, personally, to say that all is not as we wish it was. Christian counselor Larry Crabb was right when he said, “*There is always something wrong with everything.*”

And here is Paul’s audacious claim: “***tribulation brings about perseverance.***”

...lead to perseverance to character to hope (v. 3b-4)

Of course, tribulation might NOT bring about perseverance.

We all know people for whom tribulation provokes resentment. For some, tribulations ranging from life-changing catastrophes to minor disappointments have produced bitterness, not betterness.

But, when we approach our tribulations TRUSTING in the God who has justified us, they yield something really good. Perseverance.

⁸ For instance, in one place (1 Corinthians 4) he describes himself as being hungry, thirsty, poorly clothed, roughly treated and homeless - all for the sake of Jesus. He talks of being reviled, persecuted and slandered because of his service to Christ. Then, in 2 Cor. 11:23-30, he gave the most famous and in-depth cataloguing of his personal sufferings. Included in this list are references to beatings by both Jews and Gentiles, close calls with death, being shipwrecked, being pelted with rocks, and being exposed to the elements.

I have watched as many of you have trusted God through your trials and tribulations, and have become more persevering people.

I see in so many of you a stability because you have drawn on God’s faithfulness through hard times - and that solidness draws me to want to trust God, too, when trials hit.

We have heard (and may have even told others) that God is able to bring good out of hard times. Here, in Romans 5, is one of the dozens of places in the Bible where we read how that transformation from *hard* to *helpful* happens.

Faith in the God who justifies

+

Tribulations

+

Perseverance (i.e. - time/hang in there!)

= CHARACTER.

The math is so simple even I can get it. There really is a redemptive purpose to our trials. And the end result for the believer who faithfully perseveres in trials and hardships? Hope. Strong hope.

Here, Paul has drawn a spiral where we move from tribulation to perseverance to proven character to hope. God wants all of our life experiences - and especially the harsh ones - to strengthen our hope.

Every sadness, every disappointment, every misstep we make and the rough consequences that come along with them, every hardship, is to whet our appetites for Heaven, where we will experience the glory of God.

Trial, perseverance, proven character, hope; trial, perseverance, proven character, hope; trial, perseverance, proven character, hope.

The hope that God has given you for a future beyond your wildest dreams can change everything about the way you deal with the tough stuff of life. Reflecting on your destiny with God can turn you into an exulting, hopeful person even in hard times.

And where does the “hope spiral” lead? It leads to God’s amazing love. His gift of hope changes everything and His love changes everything.

Paul expresses a certainty about that hopefulness in the “hinge” verse of our passage. The verse actually puts in words the “hinge” that holds our passage - and our lives - together:

[5] and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit⁹ who was given to us.¹⁰

When you hear those words, picture extravagance.

Picture the story told in the Gospel of John, where Mary anointed the feet of Jesus with outrageously costly perfume. She used a perfume waaaaay more expensive than was necessary and an amount waaaaay more than was necessary to do the anointing.

That’s what God’s love is like. Over the top. Extravagant. Excessive. Profligate.

Paul says that it is the Holy Spirit who indwells us who also gives us the assurance of God’s love. And the love of God is the theme of the remainder of our time together this morning.

Paul explores God’s love for us from a variety of angles. His love is beautiful, regardless from what vantage point we view it.

The LOVE of Jesus Changes Everything (5:6-8)

Our Condition when Jesus Died for Us (v. 6)

[6] For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

We were helpless

The idea that “God helps those that help themselves” is a concept as old as Benjamin Franklin’s Poor Richard’s Almanac and first century Pharisaism. It is a part of popular thinking about God to this day.

But, that thought is not present in this verse. Nor does it ever crop up anywhere in the Bible. Check it out and it won’t pass the Snopes “sniff test.” The Fact Checkers - all very busy at this time of year - would correct the error.

God doesn’t help those who help themselves. The point here is that we can’t help ourselves. God helps and saves only those who admit they are helpless.

We can picture helpless in a bunch of different ways. They all work to show our predicament before God.

We had gone down under the water for the third time; our parachute had failed to open; the bungee cord had snapped.

That’s all true, but that is not the whole story.

Christ died for us while we were helpless. But we were also ungodly. Not only *could* we not commend ourselves to God - we *would* not commend ourselves to God. We had no interest in God.

We were ungodly

Paul has repeatedly shown this throughout Romans and he has shown us that our rebellious posture toward God is a BIG problem.

When we don’t see the seriousness of our sin, Christ’s death is “nice.” It was a thoughtful gesture.

It is an act of kindness, like a neighbor bringing your morning paper to the front porch on a rainy day. It’s nice, but if they hadn’t done it, you could have gone to get the paper yourself.

⁹ Notice that it is not the Holy Spirit who was poured out on us, but God’s love which is poured out on us by/through the Holy Spirit.

¹⁰ This verse contains the first occurrence of the specifically Christian word for love, *agape*, found in Romans.

But, when you come to grips with the truth that your sin is an affront to a holy God and that you deserve eternal separation from Him in Hell - then Christ's death becomes an awe-inspiring call to worship.

I will tell you that for a number of years after becoming a Christian, I was not gripped by the wonder of it all.

Then, as I began to seriously grapple with sinful patterns in my life - really ugly stuff like an independent streak a mile wide and unloving self-protection and a demanding spirit toward God - I began to really appreciate the cross of Christ.

As I go on with the Lord, I find myself being more and more committed to seriously confronting the ugliness inside.

I seek to practice the art of *never pretending about anything* - never making as if things are better than they really are - and when I face reality square I am driven to a greater appreciation for what my Savior has done for me.

That is the idea Paul wants to get across to us when he reminds us of our helplessness and sinfulness.

But, sandwiched in the middle of verse 6 are words that refer to another truth about Jesus' death - namely its timeliness. Jesus died ***“at the right time.”***

The perfect timing of Jesus' death

Some, in reading those words, understand Paul to mean that, in an historical sense, Christ's death came at the best of all possible times.¹¹ And a case can certainly be made for that, historically.

More to the point,¹² here though, Jesus' death was timely because of our need.

Timing is everything. Comedians like Jay Leno and Jim Gaffigan know that the difference between telling a joke that falls flat and one that sends people to their knees laughing is timing.

Timing is everything when it comes to politics. Same thing is true in warfare or when negotiating a sale. Timing is everything if you are trying to navigate marital waters, play a piece of music, or compete in athletics.

In most every endeavor in life timing is everything. So also in the work of Christ.

Jesus' death was “timely” in this: He didn't wait for us to get righteous before He gave Himself for us. The time of our extreme need was the perfect time for Christ to die for our sins.

Now, this thought - that Christ died for us - sparks Paul's imagination.

You can almost see the wheels turning in his mind as he continues to write, stream of consciousness-like, toying with this idea of someone dying for someone else.

Imagine? DYING for Someone Else? (v. 7)

[7] For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die.

It is a rare thing for someone to deliberately lay down his or her life for someone else.

I know that it happens in families that one member will lay down their life for another. A mom will donate a kidney. A dad will gladly run out into the street to save his kid.

On a dark street late at night a hero will emerge out of nowhere to rescue an innocent victim of violent crime at great personal risk. Such things happen on the battlefield.

Personally, I like to think that on a good day I would lay down my life for those I love.

¹¹ Along this line, Galatians 4:4 refers to Jesus' coming at the fullness of time. Also, in Mark 1:15 Jesus says ***“the time is complete.”***

¹² And more in keeping with the sense of the verse and the passage.

I conjure grandiose visions of racing into a burning building, jumping into a raging river, crashing feet first into a criminal incident, or rushing to the scene of an auto accident to save a family member or close friend - maybe even a stranger.

But, I have never been tested in this, and I am frankly fearful that I wouldn't prove up to the challenge of heroism if and when the moment ever arises. Maybe you feel the same way.

Well, there is a reason such sacrificial acts are celebrated and it is because in Paul's day as in our own such acts are rare.

Basic urges of self-preservation and a preoccupation with "*number one*" work against a decision to lay down our lives, even for our friends.

We fear that Paul is right. Giving our lives for someone else - even for a really good person - is rare. And that brings us to Romans 5:8, surely one of the high points of Scripture for us.

The thought that God would have loved the helpless and the sinful wouldn't have entered our minds, "***But***" that is exactly what He did.

The Greatness of God's Love (v. 8)

[8] But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.¹³

God loves us

God's love for us was not prompted by our righteousness. We had none. His love for us begins within Himself.

Beauty really is in the eye of the beholder and in our case, God, the Beholder, saw the beauty of our made-in-His-image souls.

When the Bible says that God loves sinners, it means that He loves, not just the underdog, but the undeserving. As incredible as it sounds God loves sinful people who want nothing to do with Him.

And yes, there was a problem. His love was denied expression by the equally powerful force of His holiness. How could a holy God embrace a sinner?

In a word - He couldn't - not unless and until the sinner's heart was cleansed and his guilt was removed. And that's a problem, because we can't just go out and cleanse ourselves - nor would we if we could!

Our hearts could only be cleansed by Someone who would take upon Himself the punishment that we deserved.

That sacrifice by Someone would satisfy the justice of God and free Him to lavish His love on us, the objects of His grace.

How, then, do we know the love of God for us? Simple. WHILE WE WERE STILL SINNERS, Christ died for us.

The PROOF of God's love for us

Jesus' death didn't force God to love us against His will, as if Jesus was trying by His death to convince the Father to do something that He didn't want to do.

No, it was the Father's own love that prompted Him to send His Son to die for us - and the Son went willingly. God didn't just "talk" about His love. He took action and showed it.

You'd be suspicious of someone who constantly voiced their love and affection for you but never did anything for you to show that love. True love demands expression.

Well, God demonstrated His love in the most radical way you could imagine by sending Jesus to die on the cross for our sins, so that we now will never taste God's wrath.

¹³ Calvin, "For in a manner which cannot be expressed, God, at the very time when He loved us, was hostile to us until reconciled in Christ."

Final Thought: The Effects of the Cross of Christ

No Longer Condemned, Now Justified (v. 9)

[9] Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.

We are justified. And justification is a strong thing. It is not like a pardon given out by a governor when he leaves office.

Last year, Haley Barbour, having served the legal limit of terms for a Mississippi governor, stopped being governor. As he left office he made news by pardoning over two hundred convicted felons serving time in state prisons.

Many Mississippians weren't at all happy about those pardons. But a court later ruled that Barbour had the right to do it. Just about every departing governor or president hands out pardons to men and women they believe should not pay for their crimes.

But, being pardoned is not the same thing as being justified. A pardon short-circuits justice by granting leniency.

In God's salvation plan justice was fully carried out. It's just that it was not carried out *against us*. It was carried out against Jesus. He bore the full brunt of the wrath of God for us.

Anyone who has placed faith in Jesus, the One who died and rose again, can be certain that they will never face God's wrath and will not be eternally separated from God in Hell because the wrath of God was poured out on Jesus, who stood in their place.

Our eternal security, though, is not solely based on our legal standing before God. It is also an intensely relational thing.

No Longer Alienated, Now Reconciled (vv. 10-11)

[10] For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.¹⁴ [11] And not only this, but we also exult¹⁵ in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

Close to the heart of the Gospel is the idea of reconciliation. Paul says that we and God were "enemies." But, we have to note both sides of this enmity.

On the one hand, we ourselves were against God, active in our rebellion, and committed to independence.

This mindset is graphically illustrated in the parable of the prodigal son.

The prodigal was not content to stay in the Father's house. The prodigal wanted to be on his own, away from the restrictions of his Father. He was committed to finding fulfillment and satisfaction in life his own way.

In this, we are just like the prodigal son - committed to independence. Insisting on our own way.

Even more important than our antagonism to God, though, was God's opposition to us.

Our animosity against Him was baseless. He is, after all, GOD!! But, His opposition to us was completely justified in light of our sin.

¹⁴ The "life" spoken of here is the resurrection life of Jesus, not His earthly sojourn. The guarantee of our final salvation is the exaltation life of Christ. This is another way of saying that the believer's final resurrection is guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus.

¹⁵ This is the third time in eleven verses he has used this word. We exult in our hope of glory. We exult in our tribulations (knowing what they will accomplish in our souls as we trust God). And, now, we exult in God because of our reconciliation with Him.

In the cross of Christ it is not our enmity against God that was removed. That enmity is removed bit by bit as we grow in Christ and as we get to know Him better.

The significant thing that was accomplished through the cross was the removal of God's wrath from us. THAT is what made reconciliation possible.

Conclusion:

And, stopping just short of overusing an excellent word, Paul says that our reconciliation with God causes us to ***“exult.”*** (He does use the word three times in this one passage.)

From time to time you may have noticed that I will make reference to a Greek word or to a Greek phrase as we make our way through a passage.

The New Testament was originally written in Greek, but I make only infrequent reference to the original language.

That is because, frankly, it is rare that the original language improves on the understanding any of us can get from the fine English translations that are available.

There are times, though, when the Greek will highlight certain facets of truth, much as adding pixels to a screen gives greater detail to an image on your computer monitor.

Such is the case in Paul's use of the word “exult.”

In most places where we find this word in the New Testament, it is used in a negative sense. People are scolded for ***“exulting”*** in themselves and in their own accomplishments.

Here, though, we exult in what God has done for us. The hope for a future beyond compare and the outpouring of His love are gifts that really do CHANGE EVERYTHING.