



Central
Peninsula
Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

Just Nail the Closet Door Shut and Go to Bed

Romans 5:1–11

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series: Romans: Unashamed • Undeserved • Unstoppable

We need to be more like the 84-year-old grandmother who fiercely maintained her independence and lived alone in the old family home. Her four children lived in the same town, but she rarely called them except in emergencies. It was with some apprehension that one of her sons drove to her house one morning in answer to her phone call. When he arrived she said she suspected that there was a burglar in her bedroom closet, since she had heard noises in there the night before. "Why didn't you call me last night?" he exclaimed. "Well," she replied, "it was late and I hated to bother you, so I just nailed the closet door shut and went to bed."

What is it about the response of this little old grandmother that we like? It was her calm resolve. I could see her saying to her son, "I won't let that noise get to me. Yeah, there are scary things on the other side of that closet door, but they can't get to me. Why? Because I made the door secure. So why fret about it? Whatever was in there isn't going to get out because I nailed the door shut. I'm secure. Time to go to bed."

I don't deny that there are scary things that rattle our closet doors late at night. What are those scary noises that rattle your closet doors? Is it the uncertainty and instability right now in our world? It's the rattle that sounds like fear and insecurity. Maybe for you it's an overwhelming pressure to perform better! To be a better husband, better wife, father, mother, employee, student, or Christian. This rattle sounds like failure, disappointment, feelings of unworthiness.

Maybe the rattle that scares you at night sounds like guilt. Guilt over your misplaced priorities. The rattling doors say to you, "I could of" or "I should have" or "Why did I?"

Maybe the rattle that keeps you awake at night is discouragement. Those plans you so carefully made are not coming to pass. Why God? Why would you not make this happen? I feel so let down.

Maybe the rattle that keeps you awake at night is anxiety over your future. So many pressures, so much debt, work stress is unbearable, and I have these health issues. All are things that go bump in the night.

Some of us lie awake at night listening to the rattle of desperation. What shall I do about my terrible marriage? What more can I do for my wayward son?

Some are kept awake because you find yourself in bondage. Terrified that there is no way out for you. Even more terrified that someone may find out about your secret life. You lay in bed and here is what rattles: "If anyone really knew what was really going on with me... I mean, really knew what I was really thinking and doing, the dirty stuff I am involved in... I mean, if anyone in this room today really knew what I was feeling in my heart, how I act out when no one is looking, my gosh, they wouldn't even think I am a Christian. And for that matter, am I really a Christian? I thought I was at one time, but now? Something is not right. God couldn't accept me like this!"

It all feels like pressure. And what is it that we need when we are in the midst of so much pressure? We need relief. In the first 3 chapters of Romans Paul reminded us of the pressure and our need for relief. He held up a mirror to our souls and we saw our sin up close and personal. No one was excluded in Paul's dissertation on depravity.

In Romans chapter 4 we saw the place of faith up close and personal. We saw that God's righteousness comes to us as a gift. We receive that gift through faith in God, and faith in his Son Jesus Christ. We receive the Good News of salvation by grace alone through faith alone by accepting on faith the loving sacrifice Christ himself made for us by dying for our sins on a cross. We learned about faith from Abraham's example. Abraham believed the promises of God and it was credited to him as righteousness. As Abraham was justified through faith so we are justified through faith.

Now, as we turn to Romans chapter 5, Paul turns a corner. It's as if Paul nails the closet door shut. All those scary noises that keep you awake at night? Don't worry, I have made the door secure so turn the light out and go to sleep. In other words, because we have been justified through faith, we have assurance that no matter the rattling, the closet door has been nailed shut and we can go to bed and sleep soundly.

I don't know what noise is coming from your closet, but what I do know is that God nailed the door shut and said, "It's okay. You are safe tonight. I will never leave you nor forsake you. I am standing at post." In Romans 5 verses 1-11 Paul lays out before us several reasons why we can have blessed assurance. Paul begins this section with one long sentence jammed packed with blessed assurance.

We Have Peace with God

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, (v. 1).

Paul says, "Consider where you were!" You were in a state of spiritual warfare with God. God's terrible wrath was waiting over the horizon. Now, "Consider where we are now!" Because of something which happened in the past, (we have been justified), we now have peace with God. It's a present tense, "We are having peace with God now." And it totally comes about through the channel of faith through our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is huge. We must stop and appreciate its significance. Hear that again... "We are having peace with God." We were alienated, even enemies. Now we are brought near to Him. There is nothing that can come between God and us. There is more relief in the words **peace** with God than any other. More than "You're cured" to a person who has cancer. More than "You're hired" to an unemployed person. More than "I love you" to a lonely person. More than "You're free" to a person in prison.

The more I contemplate the wrath of God that will be poured out in the fullest measure on the evil in this world, the more I experience the feelings of relief from the words, "We are having peace with God."

Martin Luther spent much of his early life trying to appease the wrath of God through a list of good deeds that religion demanded. But he found no relief. Most people when asked this question, "Are you going to heaven after you die?" will answer, "I hope so" with little assurance and calmness in their voice. The noises from the dark closet of their souls keep them awake at night because deep down they realize that religion doesn't give them assurance. Those who trust religion, if they really take it seriously, remain in a constant state of insecurity knowing that there is no presence assurance and only their own death will solve the mystery of their eternal destiny.

But we, having been justified by faith in Jesus Christ, believers know that our salvation is secured forever and that nothing can separate us from the love of God. I also know there are times when we lie in bed at night, and there are things going on in us that are upsetting and confusing. We lay there thinking, I know I have peace with God, but right now I don't feel at peace with my circumstances.

It is important for us to understand that no matter where our given circumstance goes, we have peace with God locked in. Further, in tough and confusing times we need to cling to Romans 5:1. Bad stuff happens in life but because I am justified, I have peace with God. And if I have **peace with God**, I then can have the **peace of God** enter into my everyday struggles. Remember what Paul says about the peace of God in our everyday struggles? *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in*

every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7).

What a blessing! In my justified state of peace **with** God, I can now experience the peace **of** God through prayers in every situation. In verse 2 Paul gives us another reason we can sleep with blessed assurance.

We Have Gained Access into Grace

...through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand (v. 2).

The original wording for "have gained access" is the Greek wording describing the process of being ushered into the court of a king and then being introduced to the king. The verb is in the perfect tense. Which means that we have not only been given access to the king's court, but we now live in the king's court permanently. Paul is saying that Christ ushered us into a completely new territory called grace land.

A common definition of "grace" is God's favor on those who deserve the opposite. But this context provides us even more. He says, this grace, meaning the grace in which we now stand because of justification, is a New Land. We have been moved out of "Wrath Land" and now we set up permanent residence in a place called "Grace Land."

Also, notice the word "stand." It implies the establishment of something that is permanent. Like immigrants coming into a new land, we must make major adjustments, we must learn the culture and adapt to its ways. We must learn to react differently to the rattles coming from the closet. Scary rattles no longer have authority over us in this new grace land.

I love the picture of the great curtain in the temple being torn from top to bottom at the moment Christ died. That great curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place had been broken down. The barrier that had kept sinful man from the presence of God was removed forever. Today, as people justified through faith, we can approach God on the basis of Christ's death. No other sacrifice or mediator is needed. The writer of Hebrews describes our new life in Grace Land well. *"Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need"* (Heb. 4:16). So roll over and go to sleep because we have the blessed assurance that nothing can separate us from the love of God because we now live in Grace Land.

So Paul boasts. Some translations say rejoice, but boasting fits the original language better. Three times in these verses Paul uses the word boasting. Because of our past studies in Romans, we have learned that we cannot boast in our own achievements. We have done nothing for which we can take credit. So Paul isn't

boasting in himself here. He is boasting in the accomplishment of God. His boasting is doing more than expressing his own joy over his own justification, he is saying, I boast in something that is so wonderful that I couldn't possibly have had anything to do with it.

Paul is boasting in the hope of the glory of God. What does that mean? It's important that we understand that Biblical hope isn't how we think of hope. We typically use the word hope to mean wishful thinking. Wishful thinking is when we say things like, "I hope I can see the *Phantom of the Opera* but I don't have a ticket yet." Biblical hope is not wishful thinking. Biblical hope is expressing a sure and certain thing. In fact, Paul would likely use the word "certain" except that it hasn't happened yet, so he uses the word hope to describe a future assured outcome.

A few weeks ago a group from CPC had purchased tickets to go to the theater to see *Phantom of the Opera*. With tickets in hand, Julie and I got on the train, took the ride into San Francisco, got off at the Civic Center stop, stopped for a Starbucks, and then met up with a group of CPC'ers and walked through the door leading into the Orpheum Theater. We walked in with hope. We had the assured future outcome to see the *Phantom*. Why? Because we each held a ticket in our hand that guaranteed us a seat.

Paul is boasting because he knows that because we have been justified we have the ticket to boast in the hope of the Glory of God. The Glory of God show we will attend will be Jesus' return and rule over the world. In this show we will see God fulfill his promise to renovate the world into the state of things that he desires for all eternity.

We can Boast in the Hope of the Glory of God

But there is more. Paul is boasting in the hope that one day he too will partake in God's glory. That he will share in qualities of God's glory. That his body will someday be in the likeness of Jesus' glorified body. Paul is boasting that one day because of justification his moral character will one day reflect Christ's moral character. That he will be conformed to the image of Christ. We can see how this Glory of God Show gives Paul something to boast about.

Be assured. Even as we continue to struggle in the flesh today, one day that struggle will end. Verses 1-2 is one long sentence in the original language that tells us that as a result of justification we have peace with God, and we now stand in grace and we boast in our future glory. In verses 3-5 Paul gives us a second reason to boast in something.

We can Boast in Our Sufferings

Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts

through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us (verses 3-5).

The word for suffering means pressure. Paul is saying, when suffering rattles your closet door, you can sleep well knowing that God loves you so much and cares about you so much that he has enrolled you into a carefully monitored discipleship program. He tells us that because he loves us he sees fit to not let us remain the same. Instead he uses suffering as a tool to chisel on us to make us look more like him. Paul gives us a chain reaction, like three dominoes standing on end, one falling into the next one. Suffering produces...

Perseverance. The idea is that God allows pressure to bring about perseverance. In the original language perseverance means "remaining under," patiently waiting. Don't misunderstand, I'm not suggesting for us to not try to take reasonable measures to relieve the painful pressure, but sometimes there is no immediate solution for a reason. No immediate remedy. No immediate relief for a reason. When we see that we are not to escape the pressure, we are to deliberately choose to "remain under," and when we do this we are open to the chisel.

I played basketball in high school. I love the game, but I suffered from weak ankles. Our trainer had a cure for when we tweaked our ankles. He immediately submerged our lower leg in iced water. Very quickly the pain of the cold water became unbearable. He would tell us "stay there" or "remain under" the pressure of that cold water. The longer you remain under the less swelling and the quicker the healing. The longer we persevere in suffering, the more character is produced.

Character is only revealed when one perseveres. Character gives us the picture of a metal sample such as gold or silver placed under intense heat to observe how it responds to the heat. The heat liquefies the metal. In liquid form, the impurities rise to the surface to be skimmed off leaving a more pure sample of metal behind. Character is revealed in a test. Character that matters to God is revealed through the applied heat that comes by remaining under as long as God sees fit to have us under.

Here is that word Hope again. God's character building program for believers rests on having this guaranteed victory in the future, a hope that doesn't disappoint. A hope that doesn't disappoint allows us to endure the heat of suffering with dignity and grace because we know the final score. We know God wins in the end, and that his plan will happen.

If we are honest, when we are suffering our natural tendency is to think about everything but God's love. But Paul is saying God's love is exactly what we **should** think about. What is that ultimate ground that our Christian hope rests? It is the steadfast love of God. At first I didn't understand why Paul seemed to break stride by talking about love in verses 5-8, but now I get it.

The reason our hope will never let us down is because God will never let us down. His love will never give us up.

We are Loved Beyond Measure

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (verses 6-8).

Most of us can identify with a loving parent willing to lay down their life for their child, but who would volunteer to take the place of a serial killer or a terrorist? Jesus Christ did.

Demonstrates: it's a present tense. You would think that it would say God demonstrated (past tense) his love for us when he died for us. But the present tense gives us a wonderful insight. God's love for us was demonstrated in the past with undeserved favor, and God's love for us continues to be demonstrated in the present with undeserved favor.

It's interesting to me that after showing us over and over again all the blessed things Christ did to justify us, he would be compelled to tell us that he loves us. Paul knows from his own experience that when he is suffering, he needs the reminders of God's love. He knows we need those reminders too. He knows we need the reminder when we hear noises in the closet. He knows we need it when we are called to remain under pressure every day. That reminder gives us blessed assurance.

The classic Greek language was rich in words for love. There was a word for affectionate love within a family. There was a word for love shared between two friends. There was a word for sexual love, yet when Paul and the other New Testament writers wrote the New Testament in Greek they found that none of the common Greek words were able to express what they wanted. Commentator James Boice tells us that the New Testament writers took another love word that was underused and poured their own biblical meaning into it. The new word was "agape." It means holy, gracious, sovereign, and everlasting love of God. It's the word Paul uses in verses 5 and 8.

Back to verse 5: Paul says this agape love is poured out through the Holy Spirit given to us. Wave after wave of agape delivered

by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. Paul will tell us a lot more about the Holy Spirit and grace to change us in chapter 8.

And finally Paul ties all his reasons we can have blessed assurance today into one final reason in verses 9-11. Paul pulls out his Hebrew School logic for this one. He uses a greater-to-lesser argument. It says, "If the greater thing is true, then certainly the lesser thing will be true as well."

We are Saved from Future Wrath

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation (verses 9-11).

The great thing God did was to permit his son to die for his enemies. By doing this, he reconciled us to himself. Reconcile means to cease hostilities, to turn an enemy into a friend. When we were justified through faith we were pulled out of the category of enemy and placed into the category of friend. If God had saved us as enemies, the greater thing, he will certainly save us as friends, the lesser thing.

We were God's enemies and now we are his friends, so boast in God! Because God justified us and loves us we are his friends and everything that can harm us has been sealed in the closet and the door nailed shut. So boast in God because he has given you a reason to rejoice, and so much more, he has given you blessed assurance. Boast in God as you share with others this Thanksgiving. Write the reasons for blessed assurance on your wall of Thanksgiving. And tonight, ignore the rattling of the closet door. You have been justified through faith; nothing can harm you. You are now a friend of God. You live in Grace Land. So crawl into bed and turn off the light and sleep well.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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