

How Do We Know that God Loves Us?

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[0 : 00] Thank you very much and good morning to everyone. My name is Alistair. As has already been said, I have the privilege of being the assistant pastor here at Brunford and the privilege of taking us through that wonderful passage that Sabina just read to us.

It would be helpful if you keep Romans 5 open in front of you because we're going to be diving in and out of a few of those verses this morning. And we're starting our new series on the book of Romans, specifically chapters 5 to chapter 8.

And we'll be focusing on these chapters because they give us the building blocks of the Christian life. So if you're wondering what it means to be a Christian, stick with us for these few weeks and you will soon find out.

These chapters explain the core doctrines of the Christian faith and how they are played out in our lives. So Romans can be described as a vast, vast ocean of theological truth.

And it will challenge our minds. It will warm our hearts. And it will want us to see the glory of God. It will challenge us to have a deeper desire to worship him with every area of our lives.

[1 : 10] So Romans is a letter written by the Apostle Paul to the church in Rome. And in it he teaches that all people everywhere in the world have free access to the riches of God's grace in Jesus if, if they respond in faith to the gospel, to the good news of Jesus.

So that's kind of the big take of Romans. And so let's zoom in a little bit to think about our section for today. So to get us thinking about Romans 5, I want to ask you a question.

How do you know if someone loves you? So maybe you were, when you were growing up, love was indicated by the number of Valentine's cards you received at nursery.

Or maybe as you got a little bit older, it was when you were in P1, that little boy or little girl came up and asked you if you'd be their boyfriend or girlfriend. And as you get older, you know that someone loves you by the things that they say or they do.

For example, it probably won't surprise you that Sabina, my wife, knows and feels particularly loved when I do the dishes and the housework.

[2 : 19] We gauge someone's love by their words and their actions. But how do we know that God loves us? How can the Christians in Sri Lanka, whose church was just bombed two weeks ago, killing hundreds of people, know that God loves them?

How can we, this morning, know that God loves us? How can you know this morning that God loves you when your life is being dashed against the rocks?

When the storm of life is tossing you to and fro? How can you know that God loves you? Well, we can know that God loves us because of what he has done, because of what he is doing, and because of what he will do.

And that is what we'll be focusing on this morning. So before we dive into Romans 5, we need to understand what's happened in Romans chapter 1 to chapter 4.

So in those chapters, Paul has been teaching about the depravity of humanity. How people at our very core are enemies of God. Now our natural instinct is to reject God.

[3 : 34] But the glorious truth that unfolds in the following chapters is that God has made it possible for humanity to be made right with him through the death of his son, Jesus Christ.

He was the perfect, pure sacrifice that took the place of a sinful and broken people like you and like me.

So that we can be justified. Jesus took our sin and gave us his righteousness, his right standing before God. So that is the backdrop to Romans chapter 5.

And we will see how this tremendous, marvelous truth plays out in our lives. So let's dive into Romans 5 with this question in mind. How do we know that God loves us?

Well, because he has changed your past. He has changed your present. And he has changed your future. So the first thing that we see about in this passage that shows us that God loves us is that he is the God who changed your past.

[4 : 34] Specifically in verses 6, 8 and 10. So the book of Romans is a deep ocean of theological truth that sheds light on who God is. His grand plan for the world and the nature of humanity, which is not a pretty picture.

In Romans 1, Paul tells us that humanity is wicked. In absolute rebellion against God, we naturally suppress the truth about him. And in Romans 3, we see a fatal diagnosis of the human heart. We are all sinners. Every single one of us. People who are not right with God and therefore we are rightly under his wrath. And that is the natural state of every human being in the world. And I think deep down we know this to be true, don't we? You don't need to teach a child to say no. Or show them a YouTube video on how to throw a temper tantrum. You don't need to teach people to lie, cheat and steal. It comes naturally to us. People do and can do good things, but at our very core we are sinful and corrupt.

[5 : 49] And that is how humanity is described in these verses. Verses 6, 8 and 10. People are ungodly, weak, powerless, sinners, enemies of God.

Those probably aren't the first words that spring to mind when you are asked to describe yourself, are they? But that is the truth. Naturally born into rebellion against God, at odds with our creator and deserving of his wrath.

And now you are probably sitting there thinking, well that is lovely. How does this teach me that God loves me?

And how does this teach me? How does understanding the fallenness and brokenness of humanity show me that God has changed my past? Well the truth is that God has made it possible for you and for me to no longer be his enemies.

But instead to have peace with him. So if you are here this morning and you are not a Christian, then your past has not been changed.

[6 : 52] You are still an enemy of God. And if that is you, I want you to see the beauty of this message that we call the gospel. God isn't mean because he's angry at sin.

But God is actually absolutely gracious because not only has he provided a way for us to be freed from the sin. But he actually stepped into our mess and took the punishment himself.

How can or how has God changed our past? Well verse 8 if you look with me, leaves no doubt about how God has changed your past. And that God loves you. Verse 8 says, So do you see God isn't saying get sorted and then come to me.

He isn't saying here's an ABCs of what you need to do and then I'll think about whether I'm going to accept you. Once we were enemies under his wrath, but God stepped into this world and at great cost to himself.

He declares us justified. God made it possible so that it was just as if we had never sinned. That's what justified means.

[8 : 13] God declares our transgressions and our sins paid. In these verses we see a picture of who we were. But God changed our past because as Christians, verse 1 says that we are no longer enemies of God, but a glorious truth that we are at peace with him.

So this is how God has changed our past this morning. Is it true for you? Have you been reconciled to God or are you still his enemy?

Why let there be enmity between you and God if he's made it possible for you to be declared free? So God has changed your past.

And the second thing that we see is that God has changed your present. And we see this in verses 1 to 5. And so in these verses you'll see many ideas and wonderful truths.

And we can only scratch the surface of them this morning. But please, I beg you, go home and read them time and time again. Mull them over in your mind because we can never exhaust the awesomeness that is on this page.

[9 : 26] In the first five verses we have tremendous truths that as Christians, verse 1, we have been justified. Again, verse 1, we have peace with God.

Verse 2, we have access to God. Verse 3, we can rejoice in our suffering. And verse 5, God has given us the Holy Spirit. So we could study these truths for the rest of our days here on earth.

And we couldn't even begin to grasp the magnitude of them. And having said that, let's have a little look at them. So Paul summarizes chapters 1 to 4 of Romans in chapter 5, verse 1 by saying, Therefore, since we have been justified through faith.

And what follows on in these verses are the practical applications of that justification. If we are justified, it is just as if we had never sinned.

And these applications of how God is changing our present. Jerry Bridges, a Christian author, says this about justification.

[10:35] To be justified means more than to be declared not guilty. It actually means to be declared righteous before God. It means God has imputed or charged the guilt of our sin to his son, Jesus Christ.

And has imputed or credited Christ's righteousness to us. So this is courtroom language. And if we even grasp a tiny bit of its meaning this morning, we will walk away from this text with our minds full of God's truth.

Our hearts bursting with love for a just and a gracious God. And with a deep desire to worship him. All day, every day.

This justification can never be earned. We can never do enough to deserve it. And so imagine that you have a debt of hundreds and hundreds of thousands of pounds.

There's no way you will ever pay it back. And every day you walk around knowing that you have this price hanging over you. And so you walk into the bank every day.

[11:44] You sweep the floors. You clean the toilets in hope that the manager will look at you and think, yes, I'll just get rid of his debt. You try to do all you can.

And so imagine the relief that when one day the manager walks up to you and says, your debt has been paid. Completely gone. Imagine how thankful you'd be that that price had been taken away from you.

And if that's the case with money, how much more thankful should we be that once we were on the path that led to hell, an eternity without God, and Jesus stepped in and took God's wrath and set us on the path that leads to heaven, to an eternity with him.

That is justification. Jesus died. And those who believe in him, it is just as if they'd never sinned.

That is what justification means.

And the first practical application of this justification in verse 1 is that we have peace with God. But this peace is far more than just the absence of enmity between God and the Christian.

[12:57] It's not the same as the peace that comes when two countries stop fighting. But this is the peace of a king who graciously and willingly welcomes back a rebellious and guilty subject.

Now maybe you're sitting there and thinking, well, how can I have peace with God? Look at my life. There is nothing that suggests I'm at peace with God.

I don't feel as if I have peace with God. Well, let me be crystal clear this morning. This peace is not a feeling. Paul isn't talking about some form of tangible peace that is here one second and then gone the next.

But this is a declared peace. A status of peace. And it is a peace that can never be broken because it is the peace of a healed, restored, reconciled relationship to God through Jesus Christ.

Jesus made peace possible. His death on the cross is evidence that peace is available for those who believe in him. This is truth, not feeling. And if that wasn't enough to take your breath away that we are at peace with God, then look at verse 2.

[14:16] Here we see a truth that I still can't quite get my head around. Through Jesus, we have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand.

Access to God. The only response to that should be, wow. A people who were previously cut off and enemies of God have now been called into and given access into the throne room of the mighty God and creator of this world.

But we haven't just been given an access key that grants us access to God between the designated opening hours Monday through Friday and the rest of the time the door is locked.

But what this means is that through Jesus, the door, the separation between us and God has been completely removed, shattered to bits.

When Jesus hangs on the cross, he cried with his final breath, it is finished. The punishment of sin paid. And at that moment, the curtain in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

[15 : 27] That curtain was a physical reminder of the separation between man and God. A physical reminder that God is holy and we are not.

And that sign was torn. Because the sinful people have been declared free. Enemies of God have been brought into the court of the high king. Jesus doesn't offer us a get out of jail free card.

But he offers us complete access and union with God. And we know this truth is true because of verse 5. God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

So God the Spirit is living within us, spurring us on as Christians, transforming us from the inside out. And so in times of struggle, of suffering, we can come before God because we have access to his throne room.

That should blow us away. These are amazing, mind-blowing truths that are practically worked out in our lives by what we see in verses 3 to 4.

[16 : 39] We're told to rejoice in suffering. But how is this possible? How can the Christians in Sri Lanka, who just two weeks ago suffered at the hands of a terrorist attack, killing hundreds, rejoice in their suffering?

How can Asia Bibi, who spent eight years on death row in Pakistan for supposedly blaspheming Islam, rejoice in suffering?

How could we this morning rejoice if we are mocked and ridiculed at school, at university, at work, wherever it may be? How can we rejoice?

Well, we can rejoice this morning because as Christians we are justified. We have peace with God, we have access to God, and we have God the Holy Spirit dwelling within us.

But Paul isn't saying this is one who's never suffered in his life. He isn't writing, having lived a life of luxury and comfort. Friends, if you are suffering this morning, if you are downcast and weak from the struggle of living a faithful life in a world which despises Jesus and despises God, Paul isn't patting you on the back and saying, man up.

[18 : 03] He isn't saying that you need to put on a smile and fake it till you make it. He isn't giving us a pep talk to keep us going from Sunday to Sunday.

But the truth that is here is far more substantial and glorious than that. Paul is saying that our suffering now, as difficult and heart-wrenching as it is, and there is no doubt about that, it is not worth comparing to the glory that awaits Christians in the future.

Paul explains what this suffering looks like in chapter 8, verses 18 to 27, and you can look that up later on. It's suffering as a result of living in a world that hates God.

But let me make it clear that our suffering is not meaningless. Our suffering is not pointless. It is producing in us a greater hope of the future spent with God.

And, are you suffering this morning? Let it lead you to God. Are you suffering this morning?

[19 : 14] Let it drive you to your knees in utter dependence on the one who holds the sun and stars in their place. are you suffering this morning? Let it help you mature in your faith and in your expectation and anticipation of the glory that awaits you in the future as you stand in the presence of God forever.

In verses 3 to 5, we see the effects that suffering has for the Christian. Suffering produces perseverance or endurance.

And endurance produces character. Now, a better translation of that word used for character is actually provenness. And so as we suffer for our faith and persevere, our character, our absolute dependence on God is put to the test.

And we will come through the other side proven. Suffering tests our provenness and it produces in us a greater hope in God.

But this is not a wishful thinking kind of hope. This is a definite, 100%, absolutely certain hope that is based on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[20 : 31] Nothing can take that hope away from you. Is that how we're living in our present? Are all of these things true in your life or are you still at odds with God?

We can know God loves us because of the way that he has changed our past. And because of that, our lives in the present need to be transformed because we have God with us every single day helping us to follow him.

That is how we can know that God loves us because he has changed our present. And the final thing that we see in this passage and we can know how God loves us is that he changed your future.

In verses 9 to 11. In verses 9 to 11 say this, 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?

[21 : 48] Not only is this so, but we also boast or rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have now received reconciliation. In these verses we see a distinction between present and future.

And so Paul changes his focus slightly and makes a distinction between justification and salvation. And this is an important distinction to make because the two are different.

So often as Christians, when we speak about when we became Christians, we speak in past tense. Oh, I was saved at such and such a time. We never speak about how we are currently being saved or how we will be saved in the future.

But that's how the Bible uses the word saved. Past, present and future. So Paul is basically saying, you know the truth that you have been justified by Jesus and are at peace with God.

Past tense. No longer under God's wrath. You know the suffering that you undergo in this life is preparing you for heaven, for an eternity with God. You are being saved, becoming more and more like Jesus as you continue to travel towards heaven.

[23 : 02] Present tense. You are being saved. And therefore, knowing the past and the present, we can be absolutely certain that future salvation will happen.

Jesus will return. He will gather his people together and we will dwell with him forever. And this eternal state that we call heaven is described in verse 2.

It's called the glory of God. So that is the future that awaits you as a Christian. An eternity spent in the presence of God who flung the stars into space and calls you his child.

If you want a glimpse of what this place will look like, go home and read Revelation chapter 21 and 22 and be blown away because this is the future that awaits you as a Christian.

Let me just give you a little glimpse of it from Revelation chapter 21 verses 3 to 4 where it says, That awaits you this morning if you are a Christian.

[24 : 32] Wrap your head around that one. The day is coming where our salvation will be complete. That is what Paul is saying. But how can we really know?

And Paul almost preempts the question about how we can be assured that this will happen and says in verse 9, Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him?

So there is no doubt in Paul's mind that this will happen, that it is true. There is no doubt in the Bible that it will happen and that it is true. No ifs, no buts, and no maybes.

God is faithful. He has worked, He is working and He will complete that work for His people. So how can we know that God loves us?

Because He has saved us. And because He will complete that work, He has made it possible through His Son Jesus Christ and we can be reconciled to Him.

[25 : 42] That broken relationship will be restored. And how marvelous is that truth that Paul explains in verse 11. We are reconciled to God.

We are in union with God. We have been made right with the creator of this world. And so as we look to the future, to the glory of God, we can know for certain that our reconciliation is absolute. Now I clearly remember the time where I was not a Christian. I wanted absolutely nothing to do with God. I was at odds with Him.

But then by His grace, God was drawing me to Himself, changing me from being His enemy to being His Son. And that will be completed in the end where as a Christian, I will stand with God in eternity.

That's the promised future that awaits you. No ifs, no buts, no maybes. This is your future and it is glorious beyond words. Is this true for you this morning?

[26 : 54] Can you look at your life through the lens of Romans chapter 5 and know that God loves you? Can you know the glorious truths that you are justified, declared right with God, at peace with Him, and you look forward to a glorious future with Him because of Jesus?

If you can't say that is true, why run away from God if He gave up His Son to bring you to Himself? Why reject the God who took on flesh so that you can be freed from His wrath? If you have questions or want to talk about any of this, then please speak to me or anyone else you've seen up

here today and we would love to chat about it with you.

And as we draw to a close, think back to the question that we started off with. We know that someone loves us based on what they say and what they do. And we can know that God loves us because of what He has said, what He has done, what He is doing, and what He will do.

How will you respond to this amazing love of God this morning? How will He have done it?