Sermon on Romans 5: 1 – 11 – You Won’t Be Disappointed!

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.”

When he was only 7 years old, his family was forced out of their home. He actually had to go to work to help support his family. At age 9, his mother died. At age 22, he lost his job as a store clerk. He wanted to go to law school but his education wasn’t good enough. At age 23, he went into debt to become a partner in a small store. Three years later, his business partner died, leaving him with a debt that took years to repay. At age 28, he asked his girlfriend of four years to marry him. She said no. He eventually did get married. At age 41, his four year old son died. Only one of their four children lived to adulthood. At age 45, he ran for the senate and lost. At age 47, he ran for vice-president and lost. At age 51, he became the 16th president of the United States of America. His name was Abraham Lincoln. Many consider him to be one of the greatest presidents our country has ever known.

Life has its ups and downs, its challenges and opportunities. At times it can be exciting and it can also be disappointing. Jobs and promotions that never come through. Home sales and purchases that fall through. Big games lost by our favorite teams. Vacations ruined by bad weather or illness. Even when things are going well, we often hesitate to get our hopes up feeling that the other shoe is eventually going to fall. Are there any sure things in life? Anything that won’t disappoint? In our text for today, Paul tells us there is, not only for this life, but also for the life to come. When it comes to the many promises God makes to you in His Word,

You Won’t Be Disappointed! I. His suffering gives you life. II. Your suffering gives you hope.

We know that our sins make us deserving of suffering, here on earth and for all eternity in hell. Ungodly, powerless, sinners, enemies of God. These are just some of the words Paul uses in our text to describe our sinful condition by nature. “Chief of Sinners” according to the hymn we just sang. Wretched, lost, and blind sinners according to another hymn used in our worship today. “Lost and condemned creatures” are the words Martin Luther uses in his explanation to the Second Article of the Apostles’ Creed. We might try to convince ourselves that we’re really not that bad. Maybe not in our own eyes or in the eyes of others, but spiritually speaking, we are in the eyes of God.

By nature we weren’t friends of God, we were enemies. Paul writes, “the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.” How often doesn’t the hostility of our sinful nature show itself in our daily lives? Jesus once said, “you are my friends if you do what I command… if anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching.” One might say, “Halt! Who goes there? Friend or foe?” Friends speak well of others and take their words and actions in the kindest possible way. Foes gossip about others and put the worst construction on the words and actions of others. Friends seek to be kind and compassionate, forgiving others as they have been forgiven. Foes seek to take advantage of others in order to serve themselves. After Jesus served his disciples by washing their feet, he said, “now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you...Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.” Friends seek to love and serve their Lord by the way they love and serve their neighbor. So once again I ask, “Halt! Who goes there? Friend or Foe?”

For the many times we’ve played the part of the foe, we can rejoice that Jesus calls us friends. Not because of anything in us, but rather because of everything in Him! Paul tells us, “very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die.” The back cover of the most recent issue of “Forward in Christ” contains an excellent article based on these verses from the book of Romans. If you haven’t read it, I encourage you to read it when you get home. Using the movie, “Saving Private Ryan,” it describes how eight soldiers went behind enemy lines to save a man known as Private Ryan. Why so much time and effort for one man? Because three of his brothers had already died in combat. To spare his mother the grief of possibly losing her final son, eight men were sent on a rescue mission. Would his rescued life be worth the sacrifice? Would yours? God thought so! So much so that he sent his one and only Son on a rescue mission to save you! Would you be willing to lay down your life for someone else? I suppose it might depend on who that someone is. Would you lay down your life for your spouse? Would you lay down your life for your child?
Would you lay down your life for a friend? Would you lay down your life for an enemy? Probably not, but that’s exactly what God did for us!

Paul says, “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” The disappointing end we deserved because of our sins is something we won’t receive because of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus our Savior. He willingly endured the pain and suffering, the punishment for sin and the agony of hell so that we would never have to. The innocent one was declared guilty to declare the guilty innocent. That’s what it means to be justified! In the eyes of God, it’s “just as if I’d never sinned,” and, “since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.”

Paul uses the word reconciled a couple of times in our text. The Greek word is “katallage” which has the idea of replacing enmity with friendship. The Greek verb is passive which means that God did everything for us! By nature, we were God’s enemies. By grace, we are God’s friends. God did everything when it came to bringing about this reconciliation, this peace, this faith in which we now stand. This faith came through hearing the message and “the message is heard through the Word of Christ.” Through the Means of Grace, the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, the Holy Spirit creates and strengthens faith in the heart. Faith that enables us to, “rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.” Faith that realizes that if God did this when we were his enemies, imagine what he’s going to do now that we’re his friends! That’s the point Paul makes when he writes, “if, when 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!” That’s the reason why we can rejoice even in our sufferings because we know the purpose they serve for this life and the next. Peter writes, “these have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

Paul knew suffering. Concerning Paul, Jesus once told a man named Ananias, “I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.” On one occasion, we’re told that Paul was given a thorn in the flesh. We’re not told exactly what it was. Three times Paul pleaded for God to take it away. God didn’t take it away, rather he told him, “my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Any thorns in the flesh that you’re dealing with? Physical, mental, emotional? God might not take it away, but he gives you the same promise he gave Paul. His grace is sufficient for you. It’s all that you need for this life and the next. God’s grace enabled Paul to, “delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” We don’t find our ultimate strength in ourselves. We find our ultimate strength in Christ!

No matter what life might throw at us, no matter what suffering we might endure, no matter what hardships we might endure, no matter what storms we might endure, no matter what might threaten to shake our body and soul. Jesus died and rose again to give us the gift of heaven! Doesn’t it make sense that he’s also going to do what it takes to get us there? In our second lesson last weekend, Paul wrote, “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” I came across an illustration that put it this way. If someone cares enough about you to rescue you from a burning building, doesn’t it make sense that they would help you out with food, clothing, and shelter as well? In our text Paul tells us the purpose of suffering when he writes, “Suffering produces perseverance.” The ability to take one shot after another and stand strong in God’s grace. “Perseverance produces character.” People who aren’t tossed back and forth by the storms of life, but are firmly anchored in the safe harbor of our Savior. “Character produces hope.” Hope to live our lives here on earth knowing that we’re not going to be here on earth forever because heaven is our home. Finally, Paul tells us, “hope does not disappoint us because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.” When it comes to the many promises God makes to you in His Word, you won’t be disappointed! His suffering gives you hope.

Abraham Lincoln was a great president in this sweet and blessed country of ours. But far greater is the King we have in Jesus and the sweet and blessed country of heaven that is ours through Him. With the hymn writer we say, “oh, sweet and blessed country, the home of God’s elect! Oh, sweet and blessed country that eager hearts expect! Jesus, in mercy bring us, to that dear land of rest; you are with God the Father and Spirit ever blest.”

Amen.