

I.N.I.

1st Sunday in Lent
March 1, 2020
Romans 5:1-11

In Christ Jesus, through whom we have peace with God and the certain assurance of heaven,
Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Lent is a somber time. Lent is a time of sober reflection upon our lives. During our evening Lenten services it is customary not to sing the Hallelujahs in our liturgy. Lent is the time for meditating upon the suffering and death of Jesus and upon our sins that brought about that sacrifice. Lent is a time for repentance and a renewed desire to serve the Lord. Lent is a time of focusing our hearts and minds upon God's great love for us sinners! Does that mean there is no joy in Lent? Not at all! In fact from our sermon text this morning we see that

LENT IS A TIME TO REJOICE IN ALL OF OUR AMAZING BLESSINGS

There is this unique dichotomy to the Lenten season. The hymns are much more mournful, many written in a minor key. The evening mid-week Lenten services focus on sin, repentance, suffering and death and yet all of this is part and parcel of this wonderful season of Lent, a time of preparation for the JOY of Easter and the Resurrection! So can there be joy in Lent? **YOU BET!!**

The Apostle Paul clearly reveals for us the reason for our rejoicing during the Lenten season. In vs. 1-5 he describes for us what amazing blessings we have, thanks to what God in Christ has done for us. We read; **THEREFORE, HAVING BEEN JUSTIFIED BY FAITH, WE HAVE PEACE WITH GOD THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, THROUGH WHOM ALSO WE HAVE ACCESS BY FAITH INTO THIS GRACE IN WHICH WE STAND, AND REJOICE IN HOPE OF THE GLORY OF GOD. AND NOT ONLY THAT, BUT WE ALSO GLORY IN TRIBULATIONS, KNOWING THAT TRIBULATION PRODUCES PERSEVERANCE; AND PERSEVERANCE, CHARACTER; AND CHARACTER, HOPE. NOW HOPE DOES NOT DISAPPOINT, BECAUSE THE LOVE OF GOD HAS BEEN POURED OUT IN OUR HEARTS BY THE HOLY SPIRIT WHO WAS GIVEN TO US.**

What amazing blessings:

- 1) **PEACE WITH GOD**
- 2) **HOPE OF HEAVEN**
- 3) **STRENGTH IN SUFFERING.**

Paul begins by reminding his readers and us that we have been justified. This is one of the most important terms in the Christian religion. We talked about that term this past Wednesday in our first mid-week Lenten service. God has removed from us all of our sins, our guilt, our debt by declaring us to be "Not Guilty." The punishment we deserved has been placed upon His Son. Since His Son has paid the price, by suffering and dying in our place as our Substitute, God as the Supreme Judge of all of mankind, declares me and all the world **NOT GUILTY, INNOCENT!** This is all God's doing, not ours. Since we have been justified by God through Christ Jesus our whole standing before God has changed. No longer are we at odds with God, enemies of His, but now we have **PEACE WITH GOD.**

Adam and Eve lived in that perfect peace for some time in the Garden of Eden, but they threw it all away and became God's enemies when they listened to Satan, disobeyed God's clear command and brought sin and damnation into the world. They felt the guilt of their sins and tried to hide from God. They were now afraid of God and of what God would do to them because of their sins. They had no peace with God, only a fearful anticipation of God's wrath. Peace with God came only when they heard and believed the promise of the Savior whom God would send to crush Satan. The consequences of their sin they would still have to endure; suffering, pain, illness and finally death, but the barrier of their sin between God and themselves would be removed by the coming Messiah. We have that **PEACE THROUGH CHRIST!**

We also possess through faith the **HOPE OF HEAVEN.** As we have said many times the word "hope" in the Bible means more than our English version, which means "a desire, a wish." The Greek word for hope means "a joyful and confident expectation, a trust, a sure anticipation." It is not

crossing our fingers and knocking on wood. It is taking God at His Word. It is relying and believing in His promises of grace and salvation. It is a sure and certain expectation of what God has already declared: **HEAVEN IS OURS; that is our hope, our assurance!**

And that hope cannot be taken away from us even in the midst of trials and tribulations. In fact Paul tells us that our hope grows stronger in trials. We read again verses 3-5 **AND NOT ONLY THAT, BUT WE ALSO GLORY IN TRIBULATIONS, KNOWING THAT TRIBULATION PRODUCES PERSEVERANCE; AND PERSEVERANCE, CHARACTER; AND CHARACTER, HOPE. NOW HOPE DOES NOT DISAPPOINT, BECAUSE THE LOVE OF GOD HAS BEEN POURED OUT IN OUR HEARTS BY THE HOLY SPIRIT WHO WAS GIVEN TO US.**

What a strange thing to say. **GLORY**, that is **rejoice**, literally, **boast** in your tribulations. The same reason that we can rejoice in Lent, is the reason for our rejoicing in tribulations. These afflictions, the pressures of life; especially the pressures of being a Christian produces perseverance. Perseverance means “bearing up under a heavy load, enduring, being patient, steadfast.” The more trials and pressures that come upon us the more we can endure; the more we in Christ can carry and bear up under. It is a lot like a weight lifter. He doesn’t start out with 300 lbs. He probably begins with 50 or 100 and as his muscles are tested and strengthened he adds more and more weight till he can bear up under the 300 lbs. So as we go through the trials and pressures of being caring, loving, faithful children of God, our faith and trust in the Lord grows. Our spiritual muscles are tested and stretched, our reliance upon ourselves decreases and our dependence upon the Lord Jesus increases and we can endure more and more.

This perseverance produces character. Character means “experience, being tested.” This word is used when testing coins or metal to see if they meet the required weight or quality. Our faith is put to the test, proved when trials and tribulations come and we persevere. What kind of Christian character do we have? Do we bear up and endure or crumble and fall under trials and stress, under troubles and temptations? Our Christian character in turn produces hope and we’re right back to where we started with the joyful confident expectation of God’s love in Christ.

What a blessed circle. We have **hope** in Christ. **Tribulations** produce **perseverance**; which produces **character, a proving of our faith**, which produces **hope**. And Paul triumphantly declares **HOPE DOES NOT DISAPPOINT, BECAUSE THE LOVE OF GOD HAS BEEN POURED OUT IN OUR HEARTS BY THE HOLY SPIRIT WHO WAS GIVEN TO US.**

How did we receive all of these blessings? That’s Paul’s second point.

II: THEY ARE OURS THROUGH GOD’S UNDESERVED LOVE IN CHRIST

We read vs. 6-8 **FOR WHEN WE WERE STILL WITHOUT STRENGTH, IN DUE TIME CHRIST DIED FOR THE UNGODLY. FOR SCARCELY FOR A RIGHTEOUS MAN WILL ONE DIE; YET PERHAPS FOR A GOOD MAN SOMEONE WOULD EVEN DARE TO DIE. BUT GOD DEMONSTRATES HIS OWN LOVE TOWARD US, IN THAT WHILE WE WERE STILL SINNERS, CHRIST DIED FOR US.**

Our rejoicing and boasting surely cannot be in ourselves. For in these verses Paul is describing us as we really are: **without strength, ungodly, sinners!** We are powerless. Now we don’t like to hear that, to be told we are weaklings. By nature we all like to think that we have some strength to help ourselves, to save ourselves, or at least some strength to help persuade God to save us and love us. But Paul says we are without strength, powerless. We not only have no strength to help ourselves, but we have no strength even to seek God’s help, no strength to serve Him, no strength to even draw His attention toward us. Like being adrift on a raft on the sea we don’t even have the strength to wave our arms and call for help.

To confess this, to admit to this is impossible for unbelieving mankind and it is even hard for us Christians whose sinful flesh always wants to claim at least some credit, to believe it has some worth, can do some work or effort. But God’s Word is clear. We are **POWERLESS!** And what a comfort that is. Since we are powerless, our entire salvation depends upon God’s power alone and not ours. Since it is dependent upon God’s power alone, then our salvation is complete and assured. That is the boasting we are to do, boasting and rejoicing in the Lord Jesus, not ourselves. Our redemption is assured our salvation is secure.

Paul also calls himself and all of us **ungodly**. We were all conceived ungodly; without a

knowledge of God; dead in our sins; spiritually blind; enemies of God; under Satan's control. Yet for us powerless, ungodly sinners, Christ died! There could never be a greater demonstration of love than that. Would you die for your spouse, your children, your parents, family members, closest friend? Probably! But how about the one who robs you, beats you up, hates you, wants to kill you, is your enemy? Would you die for him? Not a chance! As we again focus our hearts upon the cross during Lent we are reminded that we are those robbers, those enemies, those who did not love God for whom Christ died. **THAT WHILE WE WERE YET SINNERS CHRIST DIED FOR US.** How great God's love in Christ is for us. How can we not during Lent, **rejoice in our amazing blessings?**

But Paul is not done yet. There is more.

III: ALL OF THIS IS GUARANTEED THROUGH RECONCILIATION

Paul writes in vs. 9-11 **MUCH MORE THEN, HAVING NOW BEEN JUSTIFIED BY HIS BLOOD, WE SHALL BE SAVED FROM WRATH THROUGH HIM. FOR IF WHEN 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. AND NOT ONLY THAT, BUT WE ALSO REJOICE IN GOD THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, THROUGH WHOM WE HAVE NOW RECEIVED THE RECONCILIATION.**

Paul now uses simple logic, reasoning from the greater to the lesser. If God the Judge has declared us **NOT GUILTY**, then certainly we also will be spared from His wrath and damnation. Paul comes full circle back to this same marvelous term: **JUSTIFIED!** It is an established fact. God did justify us all because His Son died for us ungodly sinners. Therefore we who believe this can be absolutely certain that we will be able to stand on Judgment Day not under God's wrath, but safe and secure in Christ.

Paul's logic is this. If the death of God's Son can make God's enemies His friends, then certainly the fact that God's Son lives forever will guarantee salvation from His wrath to all who have been reconciled to Him. Three times Paul uses the word reconciliation. What we were and what God has now made us, is in that word. It means **"to make a change in one's standing or status, to replace enmity and hatred with friendship and love, to bring one back into one's favor."**

This word is used in the passive tense, which means that this change in our status before God was something done to us by God, not something that we did or even cooperated in. In his second letter to the Corinthians Paul clearly tells us what brought about this reconciliation. We read, **NOW ALL THINGS ARE OF GOD, WHO HAS RECONCILED US TO HIMSELF THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, AND HAS GIVEN US THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION, THAT IS, THAT GOD WAS IN CHRIST RECONCILING THE WORLD TO HIMSELF, NOT IMPUTING THEIR TRESPASSES TO THEM, AND HAS COMMITTED TO US THE WORD OF RECONCILIATION.** It was we who needed to be reconciled to God, not God to us. We sinned, we built that wall of transgressions, we broke God's laws, we brought down upon ourselves God's wrath and condemnation. And it is Christ's perfect life and atoning sacrificial death for us that brought about our reconciliation.

When God, according to His justice, should have damned us because we were His enemies living in sin; He didn't. Instead, according to His undeserved love, He removed the reason for His wrath toward us, by taking our sins and placing them upon His Son. He had Jesus pay for them all. Jesus suffered the penalty of hell and damnation for us on the cross, so that we are now regarded as not only His friends, but His children.

So what is Lent all about? Lent is about change, about the change in our status before God, which Christ earned for us and which we have received through faith. From enemies to His beloved children; from sinners to saints; from ungodly to God's own!

Yes, Lent should certainly be a time of somber, sober reflection upon our sins, godly repentance over our transgressions and a sorrow in knowing that our sins nailed Jesus to the cross. But Lent is also a time of confident rejoicing and boasting in what God has done for us in and through His crucified and resurrected Son, Jesus!

**PEACE WITH GOD!
JOYFUL CONFIDENT ASSURANCE OF HEAVEN!**

**STRENGTH IN TRIALS, BY BEING RECONCILED TO GOD THROUGH CHRIST!
What amazing undeserved blessings!**

Amen.