

Romans 5:1-5

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ²Through him we also have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand. And we rejoice confidently on the basis of our hope for the glory of God.

³Not only this, but we also rejoice confidently in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces patient endurance, ⁴and patient endurance produces tested character, and tested character produces hope. ⁵And hope will not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who was given to us.

Hope

I.

It was 250 years ago yesterday. The Continental Congress passed a resolution that read: Resolved, That six companies of expert riflemen, be immediately raised in Pennsylvania, two in Maryland, and two in Virginia; ... [and] that each company, as soon as completed, shall march and join the army near Boston, to be there employed as light infantry, under the command of the chief Officer in that army.

So began the US army, though it wasn't know that way at that exact moment. It was called "the Army of the United Colonies." The next day, 250 years ago today, the Continental Congress selected George Washington as the General and Commander in chief of that army.

Hope is a "desire accompanied by expectation of or belief in fulfillment." How much hope do you think they really had? How much hope was there that the new army would defeat the established world power that was greater than any other? How much hope was there that a new nation would be born a year later? How much hope that 250 years later we would celebrate the birthday of that new army? Perhaps in some the hope was strong. I think many of them, maybe even *most* of them, had their doubts that anything would ever really come of their audacious move.

Sometimes hope can be merely wishful thinking. The Continental Congress and the Continental Army really were hoping against all hope for victory.

II.

Hope against all hope. Wishful thinking. The word Paul uses for "hope" several times in our text for today sometimes has the connotation of something that is "contrary to all human expectations."

"Contrary to all human expectations" certainly describes what Paul said right away in the first verse of today's text: "... peace with God..." (Romans 5:1, EHV). God has certain expectations in order to have peace.

God is at peace with all who live up to his standards. So what *are* God's standards? Well, God is a righteous God, perfect and holy. It is only natural that a righteous and holy God would demand that his people would live up to those standards. That's exactly what he demanded of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. God is consistent. His standards have never changed.

To have any hope of being accepted by God—to have *peace* with God, you must be perfect. There is no option for compromise. Perfect means 100% flawless—every day, all day, for your whole life.

"Contrary to all human expectations." That's what absolute perfection is. You can't do it. I can't do it. Noone can do it. Whatever definition of hope you want to use, hope is impossible.

Despite the impossibility, Paul says: "We rejoice confidently on the basis of our hope for the glory of God" (Romans 5:2, EHV). We *boast* on the basis of our hope, some translations say. If hope is "contrary to all human expectations," how can we boast about it? How can we rejoice confidently?

We rejoice confidently, we boast, because of “the glory of God.” It is *God* who is doing something special. God is doing something that is beyond all *human* expectations.

God wants something special for you: he wants you to have peace with him. To have peace with God means that you have to be 100% flawless, perfect. On it’s face, that is totally impossible; that is “contrary to all human expectations.”

Look inside yourself. There you will find lots of flaws; lots of sins. Every single one of them makes it impossible to have peace with God. Stack the mountain of sins and flaws up and the impossibility grows even more impossible.

Yet, that’s what God wanted. He wanted what is humanly impossible. Paul begins today’s Reading: “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God” (Romans 5:1, EHV). God did something special. He justified us.

“Justify” is a term that was used in a courtroom. It means to declare a person not guilty. When Paul says that we are justified, he uses the passive voice. In other words, the declaration of not guilty, of righteousness, is something done *to* us. For each one of us, God declared that the mountain of sin we have doesn’t exist.

How could he do it? God isn’t a liar. God doesn’t cheat. God doesn’t just *pretend* that he didn’t see your sins, or pretend they don’t exist. They were there. They needed to be dealt with to satisfy his perfect righteousness. If the mountain of sins were still there, peace with God is beyond all hope; it is “contrary to all human expectations.”

III.

God’s perfect justice won’t allow him to simply *declare* you righteous and holy without a reason. How did he do it? “We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. “Through him we also have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand” (Romans 5:1-2, EHV).

Through him, through Jesus, we have obtained access to God. Old Testament believers would have understood how impossible access to God was. Tabernacle and temple worship was designed to *restrict* access to God.

The Most Holy Place, or the Holy of Holies, was a cube-shaped part of the temple. Inside was the Ark of the Covenant, the place where God promised that his presence would dwell with his people. But out of the whole nation of Israel, only *one* person could go into that room: the High Priest. And *he* could go in only one time per year, at the Great Day of Atonement.

Even then, the High Priest had many regulations to follow before he could go in. There were special clothes to wear. Special sacrifices had to be made. An incense burner had to be shoved behind the curtain and allowed to obscure the whole room with smoke before he could go in. Even the one person who could go in there couldn’t see much or do much—his eyes watering from the smoke of the incense.

How, then, could *regular* worshipers obtain access to God? That was something without hope—something “contrary to all human expectations.”

Jesus lived a perfect life to gain access to God the Father. Hebrews 9 gives the details. Jesus didn’t have to go in with the smoke of incense obscuring his vision. His sacrifice was the greatest and most valuable sacrifice of all: the sacrifice of himself on the cross. That allowed Jesus to enter the Most Holy Place of heaven itself.

Jesus obtained access. The word for access was often used to speak about ushering someone into the presence of royalty, and granting that person a right to speak. Jesus gained the right to speak for us to the Heavenly Father.

But Paul says *we* have gained access through Jesus. The sacrifice Jesus made was for us, to make *us* right with God. Jesus’ sacrifice pays for your mountain of sins—it wipes them out from the sight of God. When God looks at *you*, he sees only Jesus’ perfect righteousness.

When Jesus said: “It is finished” from the cross, the heavy curtain in the temple that divided the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place tore in two, from top to bottom. It tore to symbolize the fact that *you* have been granted access; *you* are ushered in to the presence of royalty before the Heavenly Father.

“Hope” means “contrary to all human expectations.” Hope is illogical. Hope is childish. Hope is impossible. But we boast. “And we rejoice confidently on the basis of our hope for the glory of God” (Romans 5:2, EHV). God the Father has justified us because Jesus has bought us back from the curse of sin.

III.

Later in this very Letter to the Romans, Paul says: “The desire to do good is present with me, but I am not able to carry it out. ¹⁹So I fail to do the good I want to do. Instead, the evil I do not want to do, that is what I keep doing” (Romans 7:18-19, EHV). Human efforts always fall short. I *try* to live like a Christian. Sometimes—for a brief hot second—it seems like I might be getting somewhere. But then, I do something or say something I *know* is not God-pleasing.

In spite of my own efforts, in spite of *Paul’s* own efforts, he was able to say: “And hope will not put us to shame” (Romans 5:5, EHV). Human efforts *will* put us to shame, but our hope is not dependant on us. It is God in his glory who has done something special. God has performed the impossible. Beyond human expectations he has justified us, declaring us righteous, through the redemptive work of Christ Jesus.

But even the fact that this great hope is ours is not something done by us. “And hope will not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who was given to us” (Romans 5:5, EHV). It is the Third Person of the Triune God, the Holy Spirit, who has poured faith into our hearts.

The Holy Spirit remains in our hearts, strengthening that faith and building us up. His presence even makes it possible to “Rejoice confidently in our sufferings” (Romans 5:3, EHV). That’s not normal. People usually rejoice and boast about their *accomplishments* and *complain* about whatever they have to suffer.

“We also rejoice confidently in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces patient endurance, ⁴and patient endurance produces tested character, and tested character produces hope” (Romans 5:3-4, EHV).

Sufferings produce patient endurance. Day by day you push on with the Christian life, dealing with whatever comes your way. You know that God is with you. God has done great things for you in bringing you salvation and giving you access by faith into his grace.

Patient endurance produces tested character. Tested character implies that you are battle tested. All the battles you have faced with the devil, the world, and your own sinful nature have given you a tested character.

That tested character produces hope. Back to hope again. Back to things “contrary to all human expectations.” But the patient endurance and tested character the Holy Spirit has built up in you as you walk in your life of faith means that you have *real* hope.

To be sure, it is a hope that is “contrary to all human expectations,” but not beyond your Triune God. God delivered hope to you—real hope—hope that will never be shattered or shaken. The real hope your Triune God brings means that you have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.