

96-05-03a

Okay, we're resuming our study tonight in the Book of Romans, and as we do, we'll take a moment to take a breath and clear our minds and our thoughts and ask God to be with us and to help us understand these things and to have them be useful in His plan. Let's pray. Father, we thank You for the privilege that we have of coming together and fellowshiping in Your Word.

We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will give us insight and understanding of these things. The Book of Romans is such a wonderful book and has a lot of deep truths in it, and we pray that as we study it that we will glean the things that You have for us and that as a result we will be equipped in our minds to live our lives in a way that pleases You and glorifies our Savior, Jesus Christ. We ask it in His name.

Amen. The Book of Romans is one of the first books that comes to mind when somebody says, what's a really hard book in the New Testament? What is a book that's got a lot of deep theology, a lot of profound truth, and something that takes sometimes years and years to study and get a grip on? And our approach to Romans is a little different than some. I was thinking about this earlier, and it sort of reminds me of two prospectors that are partners, and they go out to the wilderness out in Arizona or New Mexico someplace, and they see a promising patch of ground.

And they see a few little nuggets of gold up on the surface of the ground there. And they both get very excited, and they say, this is a great piece of ground. We've staked our claim out here.

And so the first prospector unpacks his pack and gets out his spade, and he begins to dig. And he's going to dig and find the vein of gold that's down in the ground. And he's shoveling, and pretty soon he's got a great big hole, and it becomes a cave and then a tunnel.

And he's way down in the ground, and every so often he finds this nugget of gold, and he puts it in his pouch, and he just keeps digging and digging and digging. And his partner, the other prospector, looks over the ground, and he sees these nuggets that are laying on the surface, and he says, you know, I'm going to walk this ground and get the lay of it and get familiar with it. And so he begins to traverse this acreage, and every so often he finds a piece of gold.

He puts it in his pouch, and he sees that there's a spring of water and a little patch of grass there that would support some livestock. And he sees a place that would make a good garden. He sees a nice level spot that's above the water level for a home.

And so he does his reconnaissance and makes himself a little home there. And the other prospector every so often comes crawling out of the hole in the ground, and I found another one. And, you know, to me, either one of those is a profitable way to do business, but our approach to Romans is like the guy that stays on the surface and tries to get the lay of the land and take advantage of what's up there on the surface and not necessarily tunnel so deep that we miss some of the things that are easier to see.

So what I want to do at the risk of, since Joseph is not here, Joseph hates review, but what I want to do is walk us one more time through what Paul is saying in this book. If you got a letter from somebody and you wanted to talk about that letter to someone else, you wouldn't take each little word and break it down and go into a lot of involved analysis. You'd say, well, this was the gist of the letter.

So what we want to review is the gist of this letter. If somebody says, well, what was Paul saying in Romans? I hope by the end of our study we can say, well, this is the basic idea he's trying to get across. This is the subject he's talking about.

And these are the main points that he was trying to make. And we know that in Romans chapter 1, Paul gave his greeting and he said, hello there, I'm Paul the Apostle, I've been given this gift by God, I have this ministry of the gospel, and I believe in this ministry. And the key verse in that chapter is, or the verses there, are chapter 1, verses 16 and 17.

Paul introduces himself and he says, I've had the chance to talk to a lot of people all around Asia Minor and Greece and Palestine and I haven't really been to Rome yet, but I hope to come and see you because my mission is to tell everyone that I come in contact with this gospel that came from God. And in verses 16 to 17 of chapter 1 he says, for I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. It is the power of God for salvation, for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

And we have seen that when Paul talks about salvation, we tend to immediately think, well, that's get saved, don't go to the lake of fire. And yet when Paul uses the term salvation, he means a lot more by it. He's talking about not just getting a ticket out of the furnace of fire in the eternal future, but what's the point of being a believer in Christ? What's the point of having God be at the center of our lives? Why are we here after we accept Christ? If it was just a matter of getting delivered from the lake of fire, we could seize on that and then kind of put that on the shelf and go live an earthly life.

But God has a purpose and that is to deliver us out of this present evil age. We can live a different kind of life. We can make a point.

God can make his point through us as we live after salvation. And it's more than just morality. It's more than just being holy or holier than other people.

God has some specific things that he wants to get across to the human race and to the angels, and he's going to do it in the lives of people who trust in Christ. And that's what he calls us to. And in the same way that in the military service, you don't go out and send all the recruiters and say, we want to go to the high schools and on career day, we want to get all these guys and girls to sign up on the dotted line, and we're going to recruit them.

We're going to make them into Marines and sailors and bus drivers and soldiers. And so once

they get someone to sign on the dotted line, they don't say, well, great, we got them in. We can include them on the roster of military people and then never do anything with them.

Recruiting has no, it's not an end in itself. It's the means to an end. You get someone into the service, and then you train them, and you accomplish a mission with them, and they serve a purpose, and their life and their career means something.

Well, that's what salvation is like. When God saves us, he isn't just interested in keeping us from the lake of fire for all eternity, although that's a big deliverance and a big factor. But what he really wants is to enter us into a new life and to accomplish a purpose with us.

And so Paul says, this is my gospel. This is what I'm here to talk about is what this new life is, what God wants out of us after we're saved. I'm not ashamed of that gospel.

It's the power of God for salvation. It's the power of God for deliverance. It's the power of God to accomplish his purpose for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

And this was a new idea because the Jews thought that they had a lock, that God only loved them, and he didn't love the pagans and the Greeks and the barbarians. And so Paul talks about the fact that this life that God has planned and that God has made available is not just for a select few people who think that they are the righteous, the holy, and the good. It's for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

And this verse 17 is a key verse. He says, because in it, in the gospel, in God's plan, the righteousness of God is revealed. This is one of God's major purposes.

People say, what is God like? Is he a great grandfatherly figure in the sky? Is he a frowning dictator that's up there ready to judge and to rebuke and correct and to sternly warn and beat us into submission? Is he kind of a drifty God that created the world and then got busy doing something else and we're all just kind of spinning out of control? What is God like? God wants to reveal himself and he says that in this gospel that he is teaching us as believers, the righteousness of God is revealed. That's his purpose. It's one of his main goals is to show what he's like.

And that's the distinguishing feature of God, isn't it? He's righteous and we're not. He's got a perfect way of doing things that is elegant. It produces good things.

It's productive. It leads to life and to reward and to blessing and to productivity and to constructive beneficial things. Everything that characterizes us goes in the other direction.

We're like the second law of thermodynamics. I think of it like the reverse Midas touch. King Midas, everything he touched turned to gold.

Everything we touch turns to fertilizer. And everything that we try to do degenerates. We try to

create societies and they fall apart.

We try to put a system of laws for justice and it falls apart. So God contrasts his righteousness with our fallen state. And that's what the gospel does.

And so when you look at this verse 17 it says, in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. Who is it that's going to catch on and learn about God and see what he's like and take advantage of this great system that God has made available to us? It's the people who trust God, who turn to him and say, I want to be in your plan. I want to be a part of your purpose.

I want you to do your will in my life. And that's all it takes. We don't have to work.

We don't have to change. We don't have to do morality. We don't have to do ministry.

We don't have to do good deeds. We don't have to pray or toil or give or sweat or anything else. We just have to trust.

The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. As it is written, the just shall live by faith. And if there was a single part of this book that gives the whole message of the letter, it's that phrase right there.

Paul's theme is that the just shall live by faith. And what does it mean to be just? It means to be declared righteous in God's eyes. We will all stand before God one day and God will sum up and evaluate our life.

And what will be the declaration? What will be the measure? What will be the final judgment on our life? Hopefully, God will say, well done, good and faithful servant. A lot of righteousness was produced in your life. A lot of God's righteousness is reflecting out of your life.

And that's the goal. So now, to get this point across, Paul does kind of a sneaky thing. And he starts by talking about all of the unrighteous people.

And he says, now we know in the world all of these unrighteous, unholy, godless, vile people and all the terrible things they do. And all the rest of chapter one talks about all of these terrible people and all the terrible things that they do. And all of the religious people who are in this audience are saying, that's right, we live in an evil world.

I saw that just last week. My neighbors next door are in this category. And they do this and that and the other.

They've got a debased mind. They're filled with all kinds of immorality and wickedness and covetous and maliciousness and envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness, whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful. All of these things are

coming out of chapter one, verses 28 through 32.

They know the righteous judgment of God, that people who practice these things are deserving of death, but they still do them and they approve of other people who do them. And so now Paul has all the religious people in the stands cheering and saying, that's right, we live in an evil world and those people are really terrible. And then Paul kind of sets the hook in chapter two and he says, you are inexcusable, oh man, you religious person that I'm talking to, whoever you are when you judge these people, because whenever you judge another, you condemn yourself, because you who judge are practicing the very same things.

And all of these righteous, upstanding, moral, religious people say, that's impossible, I'm not doing homosexuality, I'm not a murderer, I'm not a thief, I'm not an adulterer, and so forth. And so in chapter two, Paul makes the point that it's not whether or not you're performing these actions, it's what kind of thought life you have. And you can murder when you hate, you can steal when you covet, you can be an idolater when you covet.

When you put something ahead of God and you desire something more than pleasing God, you've made an idol out of that thing and you're worshipping that instead of worshipping God. Because all worship means is to put something at the top of the priority list. When you're romantically in love, you can put a person at the top of your priority list and that's a wonderful thing and it's really great when someone does that in return.

But ultimately, in the grand scheme of things, God deserves first place and demands first place. And so he tells these people, you have put your own standing in the community and you want people to think well of you, you want people to think of you as righteous and holy and good and you've made such a priority out of that that that has become your God. And you've pushed away the truth of God and the plan of God to pursue this desire that you have in your heart.

So he makes that point in chapter two and he says your morality and your good deeds and the money that you give and being circumcised and following the Mosaic law and all the things that you're doing aren't going to please God. You may think that it's pleasing people and it may please you now, but when you stand at the judgment, God is not going to declare you righteous. He's going to take these people that you look down on and despise, these Gentiles that are uncircumcised but who care about God and the things of God and he's going to declare them righteous.

And you Jews who have the law of Moses and the promises and the covenants and are sons of Abraham and so forth are going to be rejected because you didn't put God first. So Paul is making the point that it's not what you do, it's what you think. It's not what you say and how you act, it's what's in your heart before God that establishes whether or not you're going to be declared righteous.

And the basis for that judgment is are you trusting God or not? It isn't what you're doing or how

are you thinking holy thoughts or memorizing scripture. It's do you know what God has said and do you believe that it's so? If God says don't compromise your integrity to get ahead, don't deceive someone to make extra money, don't deceive someone to keep a good opinion, don't lie to cover a mistake. And if you do these things and if in doing that you desire to honor God, God will bless you.

And you may think, oh boy, if this gets out that I made this terrible mistake, my career is over, my life is over. My future is in the dumper. God says no.

If you pursue the priorities that God sets and if you seek to be honest and speak the truth, God will take care of you. And so then you have to make a choice. You say, well, do I believe that God's promise is real or do I believe that my experience tells me if this comes out, everybody's going to hate me, fire me and I'm going to be out on the street.

Which of those is more real? And that's the decision of faith. Do I believe what God says or do I believe what my instincts and my human mind is telling me? And there's often a conflict between those two. And when we say God is God, He made the universe.

If He says He can fix this, He can fix it, I'm going to trust Him. That's faith. And when we make that decision and choose that reality, God credits us with righteousness.

He says that's good. You did it right. I'm crediting righteousness to your account.

And that righteousness is what Paul is talking about back there in chapter 1, verse 17, when he says the righteous will live by his faith. Because it's at the very point that we say pleasing God is more important than achieving the things that I want to achieve in life. And we basically say I'm willing to lose that.

I would rather please God and lose my job. I would rather please God and lose my good reputation. Or I would rather be pleasing to God and be detestable in the eyes of these people.

It's right at the point that we are willing to throw those things away that God can give them to us in abundance. Because now we're not depending on them for happiness and we're not depending on them for security. And at the very point that we say I don't care what people think of me, I don't care what may happen to me, I know that I have to live in a way that pleases God.

Right at that point, God can begin to bless us and give us those things and we have great capacity to appreciate them because we're not depending on them. It's one of the great things that even unbelievers have recognized in life. It's the Richard Corey syndrome.

There was a poem, I forget who wrote it, about a man named Richard Corey. I think Paul Simon wrote a song about it way back where he was rich and had inherited a factory and was well-dressed and had a nice car and had all the advantages. And this is told from the perspective of

somebody that works in the factory and they see Richard Corey and they envy him.

He seems to have it made. He's got everything that they might ever want in life and they're shocked to open up the morning paper one day and see that Richard Corey put a bullet through his head. And having all of those things didn't make him happy because obviously from a Christian perspective there's no inkling that Richard Corey had any dealings with God.

And people who are rich then are consumed with the idea of keeping what they have and not losing it and managing it and so forth and it can be as much of a curse as a help. So that's what Paul is talking about. It's at the point that we trust God and what God says and turn ourselves over to God and our lives over to God and relinquish our grasping after these things that God can begin to give them to us and then we can truly enjoy them.

And he gives us capacity and they're guaranteed by his promises and by his grace and they can never be taken away. If God gives us peace and if God gives us prosperity and if God gives us happiness it's from the source of the greatest power in the universe and there's nothing that can take it away. So this is the message that Paul is trying to get across.

And he talks about this in chapter 3 and then he gives an example in chapter 4 and he says let's think about Abraham. All the Jewish people like to think about Abraham. Let's talk a little about Abraham.

And Abraham back in the Old Testament in Genesis there's a verse back in chapter somewhere in there 15 or 17 or so in Genesis where God tells Abraham that he's going to give him a son. And Abraham is 100 years old and his wife is 90 something. But Abraham believes God.

And Paul talks about this in chapter 4 and he says in verse 18 that Abraham contrary to hope in hope believed so that he became the father of many nations. He was not weak in his faith. He didn't consider his own body that was already dead because he was about 100 years old and he didn't consider the deadness of Sarah's womb.

He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief but he was strengthened in faith and giving glory to God. And he was fully convinced that what God had promised he was also able to perform. Now think about this.

Abraham did not do anything. He didn't perform a ministry. He didn't get moral.

He didn't relinquish a bad habit. He didn't renounce. He didn't make a promise.

He didn't rededicate. He didn't walk down the aisle at church. He didn't reform.

He didn't do anything. God made him a promise and he said, okay, I'm going to take that promise. And his friends probably thought, Abraham, this talk, this getting ready, the crib and the nursery and all this, you're 100 years old.

If you were doing this for your great-grandchildren, we could understand it. But I'm sure people probably laughed at him when he said, well, no, Sarah and I are going to have a child. And he had to put up with probably some abuse from his people that were around him.

But Abraham believed God. And Abraham said, if God said it, it's so. And therefore, in verse 22, it was accounted to him for righteousness.

Now, here's the question. What's the big deal about being accounted righteous? Why should we worry about being accounted righteous? Isn't happiness or success or getting by in this life more important than some theological abstraction that, well, God says you're righteous or God says you're unrighteous? Well, this is what Paul is going to talk about in chapter 5. And this is the chapter that we're in tonight. Chapter 5, because in verse 23 of chapter 4, which these are the three verses that lead up to our chapter for tonight, Paul says this story of Abraham wasn't just written for Abraham's benefit.

It was also written for us because the righteousness that God assigned to Abraham will be assigned to us who believe in God, who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up, meaning He died on the cross because of our offenses, and He was raised for our declaration of righteousness. The word there is justification, but it's the very same word in Greek, to be declared righteous. The reason God had Jesus Christ go to the cross was to pay for our sins.

The reason God raised Christ from the dead is so that we could be declared righteous. So when we believe in Jesus Christ, we are identified with Christ in His death, and that takes care of our sin problem. We're not going to have to pay the penalty for sin, the guilt of being a sinner is removed, the identity of being sinful, the power that sin has over us to where we have no other option but to do wrong things is taken away and we have a whole new set of options.

And at the point that we trust Christ, we are automatically identified with Him. It's as though we were with Him when He died on the cross. We are not automatically identified with Christ in His resurrection at the point that we trust Christ for salvation.

That's a choice that we make daily after being saved. We decide every day, am I going to live with Christ in the same way that when I accepted Him as my Savior, I died with Him and got all my sin problems squared away? Now I have to make a choice. I'm living today, He is alive today, He's living His life to please God.

How am I going to live my life? Am I going to identify with Christ in His life just like I identified with Christ in His death? If we do that, once again, we do that by faith. We say, yes, I want to do that. How do I do it? Well, I'm going to live in a way that reflects my trust in God.

God says, sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. Don't worry about some potentially bad thing that's going to happen tomorrow. And how does that work out in real life? Well, when you're

looking ahead to events that you know are coming up, there may be a big job change coming or there may be a change in family.

Maybe you're expecting a child. I know when we were expecting a child, in the quiet moments in the middle of the night, you can envision all kinds of bizarre things. Well, what if the car doesn't start when we need to go to the hospital? Or what if it's bad weather? What if the person designated to drive the car is away? And your mind can start running on what if, what if, and all of these potentially terrible things.

Well, God says, just concentrate on the things of today. Take no thought for tomorrow. God's got tomorrow all figured out.

There's enough evil in one day without borrowing from the future and worrying about that. And so He says, take life a day at a time. Well, we have a choice when we contemplate the future.

We can either just concentrate on operating in a way that pleases God today and just not worry about those things. And it's amazing, and all of us have had experience with this. You can think about being at a certain stage of your life and you were extremely worried about something and it just kept you up and you couldn't think about anything else and you had a deep sense of impending doom and crisis and just almost paralyzing fear and concern about the future.

And then come to find out things turn out in an entirely different way. And in retrospect you say, well, there really wasn't anything to worry about. Well, think about all the time that was spent in worry.

You've made yourself unhappy and allowed yourself to be unproductive over a non-real thing, something that was just an imaginary obstacle. Why not wait until disaster really does strike and then you can think about it. But we borrow potential trouble that doesn't even exist and bring it into the day today.

I used to think about this when I was on leave from the service and I looked forward to leave so much and I would get to go home and be back with my family and be far away from a lot of the pressures and concerns that were waiting me down. And I would look forward to it so eagerly and it would come and I would get on the plane and fly and here I was. And then about, this would be like a two-week leave, and then about three or four days before it was over I started thinking, oh boy, only four more days.

Only three and a half more, well, only three days. Only two and a half days left. And I started thinking about the end of leave and I would not enjoy the last two or three days because I knew it was coming to an end.

And I'd be thinking, well, it's the last time I'm going to get to do this. Well, I won't be here to do this again. Well, you all are talking about this thing coming up, I won't be here.

You could just make yourself all morose and depressed. And there were three perfectly good days. If those days had been at the beginning of leave, they would have been wonderful, happy days.

But because they were at the end and I was borrowing trouble from the future, I messed them up. And that principle carries over. I heard somebody on the radio say, why let someone rob you of the greatest gift that God has given you, which is your peace.

And we can be driving down the road having a great day, thinking about great things, and somebody does something terrible in traffic, and you get angry and you get upset. You think, oh, why do they let people like that on the road? And in addition to letting that person cut you off and squeal your brakes and bald your tires and everything else, then you let them take away the peace that was in your soul and the capacity to enjoy the day and the good things. You let them win, you let them conquer, and you let them take away the most valuable thing.

And so what Paul is talking about here is, he says, look, there are some great things associated with this righteousness. This is not just an abstract court decision up in heaven where God says, well, I see that so-and-so has faith, I declare them righteous. There are some concrete benefits that we gain by operating in God's plan.

There are great side effects and great results that come from it. So he starts talking about this, and he says in chapter 5, therefore, having been justified by faith, everybody that ever, I say everybody, virtually everyone who talks about the book of Romans, when we get to this section and says, having been justified by faith, everybody says, well, this is when you were saved, when you trusted Christ, you were declared righteous and you're going to heaven and you're not going to the lake of fire and so forth. But that's not what this is talking about, is it? We just reviewed chapter 4, and what kind of declaration of righteousness are we talking about? Are we talking about the day that Abraham got saved? We're not.

Abraham was a believer for many, many years. He'd been a believer for 40, 50, 60, 70 years by the time God came and said, Abraham, you're going to heaven. He was 100 years old, and he'd been a believer for a long time, and he'd obeyed God and left Ur and come to Canaan and so forth.

But when God declared Abraham righteous was when Abraham believed him because he gave him a promise. And so that's what's being talked about here. When we are declared righteous by that same kind of faith, when we take, let's take tomorrow.

Tomorrow's a good day. Tomorrow will be Saturday. Not a lot of distractions.

We can wake up and start going through the day. We can say, okay, I'm going to check this out. I'm going to see if I can live today and trust God.

And as the opportunities come up, and of course it's very helpful to have done what we're doing tonight and know something of the Word of God so we have something to trust. We know what God has said and what he's promised. When we do that and we say, well, I know this looks like it would be a good thing to do, but I don't think that would be pleasing to the Lord.

It may cost me something, but I'm not going to go down that path. God says, righteous. Good job.

You're operating in faith. I'm declaring you righteous. Paul says, this is what's going to happen when that isn't a characteristic in your life.

When you have been justified by faith. And we talked about last time this, for people who are enthusiastic about the grammar like I am, this having been justified by faith is an aorist participle. The aorist is a really interesting thing in Greek.

I won't go into great detail about it, but the aorist participle is the action that takes place before the main action in the sentence. The main action in this sentence is, we have peace and we rejoice. There are two coordinate verbs.

There are two main verbs in this sentence. Verb number one is, we have peace with God. That's in verse one.

The second one is in the last half of verse two, and we rejoice in hope and the glory of God. So those are the main verbs. Well, we know from grammar that the action of the aorist participle precedes the action of the main verb.

So something has to happen before we have peace and before we rejoice in hope and glory. And what is it? We are justified by faith. So Paul is saying, look, if you tackle this mission from God, so to speak, which is to live by faith, and you succeed, you do that, this is what's going to be the result.

You will have peace with God. If there's one thing that people are looking for in life today, it is peace. Still the voices in my head, still the uncertainty, the insecurities, the baggage from my past.

People talk about bad things that happened in their childhood, awful things that happened in their childhood, bad experiences they've had with people, bad circumstances that they have been in, bad circumstances they're in now, bad circumstances they're anticipating in the future. And why is that so terrible? Because it takes away your peace. You can't relax, you can't enjoy, you can't have capacity to appreciate all of the good things in life because these other things are weighting us down.

And so peace is a wonderful gift from God, and God tells us right here through Paul's letter, the way to have peace is to trust God, to live by faith. He is the source of peace. Jesus told the

disciples right before he left, he said, Peace I leave with you.

My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it. Jesus gives peace the way that God does.

And when God does something, it's done. If he creates a solar system, it keeps on spinning until the end of time. And if he gives us peace, it's a permanent, lasting, deeply satisfying peace.

So this is a wonderful promise from God that we can claim. And we say, Well, I know that even if I make this decision that flies in the face of common sense, and all my peers think I'm nuts, and my family thinks I'm nuts, and it doesn't make common sense, it doesn't make good sense, but I believe it's the right thing in God's eyes when I do this, I can expect to have peace in my soul, and I'll be satisfied with that, and I won't be second guessing, and I won't be borrowing the problem back, I'll just be putting it in God's hands, and I'll have peace. 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 God's grace is going to sustain us. It's God's grace that fulfills His promises. Not only do we have peace, but it tells us in verse 2, we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Wouldn't it be great if we could look into a TV screen and see a film of the future, and see what's coming up in our life, and what's coming up when the Lord returns, and see the millennial kingdom, and all of the great vista of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. If we knew what was coming, and we knew what was on the line, and we knew how great rewards, and how great blessings, and great opportunities were coming our way as a result of this life, we would live this life in a completely different way. Somehow it didn't really dawn on me when I was a midshipman at the Naval Academy how important it was to my future career as an officer to do well at school.

I thought my main goal was just to survive. And after my first two or two and a half years there, I had pretty well survived. If you make it that far, it gets a little easier.

And so in my remaining year, year and a half or two years there, I probably could have done better than I did. But I had such a great overwhelming sense of relief at not having been kicked out and having survived all the various challenges. And I think I sort of backed off a little bit, and I was just kind of getting through to graduation.

Well, I would occasionally hear, we got briefings, you know, your service selection is going to be based on your class standing. Your ranking as a second lieutenant is in some way influenced by where you are in your class when you graduate. And that didn't really make a deep impact on me, but after I graduated and was commissioned as a lieutenant and was a second lieutenant, and then I was over in Okinawa and I was really watching for that first lieutenant promotion list and what's going to be my date of rank and so forth, and the first time I saw the list, I thought, my, my, that looks an awful lot like the class standing list when I graduated.

And guys that were in the bottom of the class are going to be the last to get promoted, and guys that were at the top of the class. And then I got to thinking, you know, if I had really understood this when I was back at school, it would have been motivation to try a little harder, study a little longer, be a little more diligent, go through that paper one more time before I turn it in and get it in on time and not take points for being late and so forth. Well, this is what Paul is trying to tell us here.

If we had any idea of the consequences of the decisions that we make in this life on a daily basis, we would be so motivated to try to please God each and every day. There are tremendous, wonderful things in store for those who live by faith, who are declared righteous by God. Paul kind of alluded to this in Chapter 4 when he said, it's Abraham that got the promise.

There were lots of people who believed in God in Abraham's day, but Abraham really believed God. God came down and gave Abraham this promise. He said, you're going to be the father of many nations.

Millions and millions of people are going to look back and claim you as their father, and that's true today. The Muslims were descended from Abraham through Ishmael, and the Jews were descended from Abraham through Isaac. The Moabites and the Edomites and the many, many others are all traceable back to Abraham.

People who are believers claim the promises of Abraham through faith. It's a wonderful distinction that he has. It was a promise from God.

Paul is saying if we live by faith, if we follow Abraham's example, we can expect similar promises from God to be fulfilled. God has great things in store for us, and that's why he talks about we can rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Talking again about a difficult time that you're in, if you're going through something that's pretty difficult, but you know that at the end there's a big payoff, it's a lot easier to get through.

I think probably all of us, I don't mean to hurt Dan's feelings, but all of us have been in the dentist chair, and I have been in there more times than I care to remember. And you go in there knowing that it's going to be difficult, it's going to be painful, it's going to be terrible noises and grinding and stuff, flying, and the smell of burning teeth, and your jaw is going to start aching, and there's going to be all this clamping and prying and so forth. And nobody would go through that if there wasn't a payoff at the end.

I know that after that's all over and the Novocaine wears off and about a day goes by, I'm really going to feel better. I'll be able to chew, I'll eventually be able to eat ice cream without going into screaming fits of pain and so forth. And so it's easier to get through, and the whole time you're laying there you think, well, if I don't do this, something worse could happen, and if I do get this done, it's really going to be better on the other side.

Well, I don't know that you can actually rejoice as you're sitting in the dentist chair and say, I'm so glad I'm here. But the idea here that Paul is communicating is that we can actually rejoice in times of great stress. And he's going to amplify that down here in verse 3. Verse 2 he says, We have access by faith into God's grace.

God is going to be our benefactor. He's our Heavenly Father. He loves us.

We are in a position for Him to do wonderful things for us when we live by faith. If we don't live by faith, we're being disobedient, and we're out of the will of God, and we're out of the place where God can bless us. We're in the place where God has to discipline us.

It's not a great place to be, and yet it's where most of us wind up. But having been justified by faith, we have peace with God, we have access by faith into the grace in which we stand, and we can rejoice in the expectation of the glory of God. It starts being real to us, the things that are coming on the other side of the stress that we're undergoing right now.

And in verse 3, Not only that, but we glory in tribulations. Now this word, tribulations, is a Greek word, thlipsis, which is T-H-L-I-P-S-I-S. And it sounds like a trouble word, thlipsis.

I'm undergoing thlipsis. It's translated suffering in a lot of places, or tribulation, but it basically means stress. Thlipsis is when you're under the gun.

You're going through it. Things aren't going well. You're under pressure.

You're having a hard time. It can be physical. It can be circumstantial.

It can be from people. But he says we can glory in it. We can be motivated.

We can be satisfied. We can be gung-ho in the midst of this pressure. Why? Because we know that this thlipsis, this pressure and stress, produces perseverance.

We know that it's doing us some good. Just like sitting there in the dentist chair, well, this is terrible at the moment, but I know it's doing me some good. And so I'm willing to, you know, none of us jump up and just say, I've had enough.

I don't want the rest of this filling, and go screaming out of the office. We stay there because we know that it's doing us some good. We know that this tribulation will produce perseverance, and perseverance will produce character.

Why do we care about perseverance and character? Because these are things that please God. These are things that God can use to reflect His glory, to accomplish His purpose. And once again, we're going to be in a position to go back through this cycle of faith and being declared righteous.

And with this perseverance and character, we end up with hope, with an expectation. It's just like

at some time or another, it seems like all of us wind up being in a place where we find out we can really do something pretty well. Like you're in a class at school, whether it's shop or home ec or something, you find a place where, you know, you're really a little above average at this, a sport that you play or an activity that you engage in, and you kind of have a knack for it, and you can do it pretty well.

And there's a lot of satisfaction in that. And you don't mind that it's hard. When you start running, it's really hard, and your body resists.

And after you keep running for several days and a few weeks, pretty soon you get to where you kind of look forward to it. And it's still going to be hard, and it's still going to put, you know, tire you out and so forth, but it's a good kind of tired. And you feel good after you've done it.

You feel like you've accomplished something. And instead of being a drudgery in something that you dread, it gets to be something that you kind of look forward to. It's a healthy challenge, and it's a healthy kind of tired, and it's a healthy sort of a stress that you undergo.

This can happen in our daily life. And instead of waking up and thinking about this terrible circumstance and being depressed and dreading it, we can think, here's another chance to excel. Here's another chance to live a different kind of life.

God is with me. God's grace is here. And it's just like these other things that we've done in the past.

We can sort of get good at handling stress. We can get good at coping with unsavory people, unkind people. You can sort of have a smile on your face when you carefully and genuinely return good when someone does you evil, and when you don't get angry when someone gets angry at you.

And you start to realize that God is really starting to change the way you think, and he's putting new realities in your mind so that you don't really feel like losing your peace over this trial or this temptation. And that's what Paul is talking about here. You can glory in your stress because you know it's producing patience, you know it's producing character, and you know that there's an expectation that God is going to say, well done, good and faithful servant.

You had some rough spots there. You had some terrible people to deal with. You had some tough breaks in life.

But you trusted in God, and God is pleased that you had enough faith in him to trust that what he said was true. And you didn't get down. You didn't get discouraged.

You didn't throw it all over and go the way of the world. And he says in verse 5 that that expectation, that hope does not disappoint because in addition to all the other benefits, God's

love is poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. We find that we have the ability to love people who are unlovely.

We have the ability to reflect the love of God. God loved us when we were unlovely. He saved us when we were his enemies.

Christ died for us when we were sinners and had no redeeming qualities. And we find that we can be a reflection of that, and we can be a testimony to God's love and God's grace in this life. And so this section now here in verses 6 through 11 says, For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

And this word for ungodly, asebos in Greek, A-S-E-B-O-S, is a pretty strong word. This carries the weight that in English when we say pagan, or it has kind of an unsavory connotation. It isn't just that you're without God.

It's not like you're an agnostic or something. It's more like you're against God. You reject God.

You're an unsavory character. And yet Christ died for us when we were distasteful to God, when we were in opposition to him, when we were his enemies. He says, and he's talking about the human realm in verse 7, A man might die for a righteous man.

And we see this happen in battle. Three or four or five guys in a bunker, in a hole, and a grenade comes rolling in, and one of the guys will instinctively jump on it and cover it up and sacrifice his life for his companions. And he cares about them.

He doesn't jump out of the hole and leave them to their fate. If he thinks they're good people, he might die for them. Policemen and lots of folks will often sacrifice their lives trying to save someone or trying to rescue someone.

Perhaps for a good man, someone might even dare to die. But God demonstrates his love toward us in that when we were sinners, Christ died for us. When we were repulsive in God's sight, he still loved us and sent Christ to die for us.

So now Paul's going to bring this up and he's going to make a point. He's going to say, look, and keep in mind, why is Paul having to argue this point? It seems pretty clear to us. But he's talking to a lot of religious people who think that the reason God accepts them is because of what they do, because they're very moral, because they give money to the temple or to the synagogue, because they scrupulously keep the law of Moses.

And when it says tie a tassel on the corner of your garment, they've got a great big tassel down there. When it says tie the Word of God on your forehead and on your hand, they strap it on there in a little pouch with thongs. And every little regulation that they feel like they can keep in the law of Moses, they do it.

And they say, well, look at all these things I've done. I'm righteous. And Paul is saying, look, that's not the righteousness God is looking for.

God's looking at the righteousness that he assigns to you. He's looking for his own righteousness that he credits to you. He's not looking for some righteousness that you generate, that you make because you're moral or you're good or you're doing these good deeds.

And so Paul is arguing to these people and he's trying to make the point. And he says, look, when we had no redeeming qualities, when you hadn't done any good deeds and all your righteousness was like filthy rags in God's eyes, Jesus Christ came and died and saved us. So that should tell you that the love of God and this righteousness thing doesn't have anything to do with what we do, because we didn't do anything and God did the most for us when he sent Jesus Christ.

That's the greatest expression of love and grace that there could be. And we didn't do a thing, couldn't do a thing to please God. So then in verse 9 he says, much more than if we now are being justified by his blood, if we're trusting in Christ and God is assigning us his righteousness on a day-to-day basis because we're trusting him, think of what he can do for us now that we really are in his family and out from under the guilt and the burden of sin.

And we're not repulsive and hopeful of this statement that Paul is making. Much more now we will be delivered from wrath. When the judgment takes place, we're not going to be found lacking.

God's not going to say, I'm sorry, but you failed test after test after test. I gave you opportunity after opportunity. I put my promises out there where you could know them and trust them and he just threw it over and went your own way every time.

We will be delivered from that wrath that he talked about back in chapter 2 when he said we're all going to stand before God and be evaluated and for people who by patient continuance seek for glory and honor and immortality, God's going to grant the eternal life blessings, all of those great rewards and things. But for people who suppress the truth and want to go their own way and live life on their own terms, there's going to be tribulation and anguish and the wrath of God. God's going to be very unhappy that after all of this stuff he did, we didn't think enough of him to try to live in a way to please him.

We can be delivered from that wrath through Jesus Christ by being justified through his blood, being declared righteous by trusting him on a daily basis. Verse 10, he repeats this point in a slightly different way. He says, look, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God.

What's the difference between a friend and an enemy? When enemies meet, they do harm to each other. They do evil to one another. When friends meet, they bless one another.

They upbuild and help one another. And it's a beneficial relationship. So you've got an adversity

relationship or a beneficial relationship.

When we were enemies, God turned us into friends. We were reconciled to God through the death of his son. And so much more in verse 10, having been reconciled, now that we're already friends, God doesn't have to overcome this big hurdle of turning us from enemies into friends.

We're already friends. We're already reconciled. We have a relationship.

Having been reconciled, we will be delivered by his life, by the life of Jesus Christ. We've already been identified with Christ in his death and our sin problem and our repulsiveness before God was taken care of. We're in God's family.

He's our heavenly father. We're his children. Think of the things that he can do for us if we just let him, if we just trust him.

Wouldn't it be great if our children had enough faith in us to trust us when we tell them, no, you can't have that extra piece of candy. And maybe we don't even tell them why. We know that it'll make them sick and they'll throw up.

They don't know that. They just know that they want it. And we say, I'm sorry, but I can't give that to you right now, or I can't let you go out and play right now, or I can't.

We deny them things that they feel causes unhappiness and restricts their enjoyment of life. But the reason we do that is because we love them and we know what's best for them. We have to have that same kind of trust in God that when we live the way that he asks us to live, and we trust him and follow his priorities, we have to trust him and say, he's a good heavenly father.

He loves me. He wouldn't ask me to live this way or to respect this principle or to claim this promise. The reason he asks me to do that is because he loves me and he wants the best for me, so I'm going to do it.

And when we live that way, we are delivered by his life. We rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have received the reconciliation, the relationship that we have with God. Not only do we have that relationship, but we can enjoy it in an immense way.

We're going to stop and take our break here, and then we're going to quickly... This next section in chapter 5, verses 12 through 21, is a real deep argument that Paul is making. Once again, he's trying to hack through the thick skin of the religious people that he's talking to. They just can't wrap their mind around the fact that God isn't impressed with all of the great, wonderful things that they've done.

And they're banking on this. They've done it for so long, and they've stacked up a big pile of these good deeds, and they're really expecting to kind of trot this big pile of good deeds before God and say, God, see how good I've been? And they're expecting God to say, oh, yes, well done. I'm glad

you gave and worked and observed and did all these things.

And Paul is having to chip, chip, chip away at that impression and say, don't you see, it's what you think, not what you do that counts. So this next section here, he's going to argue from salvation, from what happened when they were saved. That's the one thing that they've got straight, or they wouldn't even be listening to Paul, is they understand how salvation works.

So Paul's going to argue from something they do understand and try to get them to see something that they don't understand. That's what he's going to do in this next section. But we'll stop here and take a break, and then we'll resume.