

“That Changes Everything!”

¹Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through 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. ³Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

⁶You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

⁹Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰For 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! ¹¹Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

I want you to picture a gathering of your favorite people – people you are totally comfortable around. Food and drinks are being enjoyed. There is good conversation and plenty of laughing. Your favorite music is playing in the background. The mood is one of happiness and fun. Isn't that what this section of Scripture feels like? The blessings are flowing in Romans 5:1-11.

- Even though you didn't deserve it, Jesus suffered the death penalty for your sinfulness.
- You are justified, “not guilty” in God's sight, by the faith in Jesus Christ that God the Holy Spirit worked in you.
- You used to be an enemy of God because of your sinfulness, but because of the gift of justification God gave you through Jesus you and God are at peace with each other as your relationship has been reconciled.
- You will not experience God's wrath in Hell on the day you die or Judgment Day. Instead, you will be rejoicing for eternity as you enjoy the glories of Heaven.

When you add it all up, don't you feel like you are experiencing this: **“God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us”** (Romans 5:5). Reflecting on Romans 5:1-11 feels like that gathering of your favorite people. Everyone is having a great time and then all of a sudden the music comes to an abrupt halt. Shocked people stare at Jesus when he addresses the group through the Apostle Paul, **“We also rejoice in our sufferings...”** (Romans 5:3). What is Jesus talking about? Jesus isn't done. **“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me”** (Mark 8:34). Say what?!?! Who invited Jesus to the party? Jesus really knows how to ruin a good party or so it seems.

Each of us wants life to be easy, comfortable, and our way 100% of the time. God knows that is not the best way to keep our eyes focused on spending eternity in Heaven, so he presents us with a more

balanced approach toward life. And that balanced approach includes some suffering and sacrifice. There are two ways to deal with God's balanced approach plan for each of our lives. Either we can fight his plan with our grumbling, complaining, and selfishness which makes compliance to God's plan seem unbearable. Or we can embrace God's balanced approach plan with a Romans 5:1-11 "That Changes Everything" attitude.

Suffering or sacrifice crosses come in various forms, but they all present us with the opportunity to embrace them or avoid them. Let's say God sends some suffering into your life – something that isn't directly connected to some sinful action on your part, but rather just a general consequence of living in a sin tainted world. Perhaps it's a health issue, or a financial issue, or a gift or talent that you lack, or something in your life that didn't turn out to be successful, or a home, school, or work situation that is less than ideal. Things like this make life more challenging. Do you find yourself rejoicing in that suffering or do you find yourself feeling depressed, angry, grumpy, and unproductive? At times like this you need to let Romans 5 pour all over you. **"But we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope"** (Romans 5:3-4). When you look at your suffering from that perspective, that God can cause blessings to come from it, that changes everything! Or let's say the suffering in your life is a result of a consequence of your sinful actions. Your sinful actions have damaged a relationship long term, or hurt your reputation, or limited some of the opportunities you can experience in your life. Do you find yourself rejoicing in that suffering or do you find yourself allowing guilt and regret to rule your heart and life? At times like this you need to let Romans 5 pour all over you. **"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."** (Romans 5:1-2). You might not have peace with others because of your sinful actions and your name might be mud in the court of public opinion and some opportunities in life might be off limits to you now, but you have peace with God because of your faith in your Lord Jesus Christ who secured a "not guilty" verdict for you in the court of God's opinion and access to spend eternity enjoying the glory of Heaven. When you look at your suffering from that perspective, that changes everything! Let's say you get up the courage to have a spiritual conversation with someone based on Scripture, but they reject your message. Do you willingly embrace that cross and with joy move on to the next person and spiritual conversation? Or do you dwell on that how that person rejected your witness and it makes you hesitant to make yourself vulnerable again in that way because you didn't like the feeling of being rejected? At times like this you need to let Romans 5 pour all over you. **"Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him"** (Romans 5:9)! Other humans might reject you, but because of Jesus you have been saved from being rejected by God forever in Hell. When you look at your suffering from that perspective, that changes everything! Let's say you are striving to live a Christian life in your various vocations so that you can positively impact others, but it actually has the opposite effect on some. Some either give you a hard time for living like a Christian or they avoid you because of your positivity. Do you rejoice in that suffering, or does it make you want to hide your Christian faith around certain people? At times like this you need to let Romans 5 pour all over you. **"For 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"** (Romans 5:10)! Maybe publicly living as a Christian will affect your relationship with some people, but that can't change the fact that Jesus fixed your broken relationship with God now and forever. When you look at your suffering from that perspective, that changes everything! You have the opportunity to volunteer your time to help other people at home, in your community, or at church even though it might mean sacrificing some your personal recreation time. You have the opportunity to sacrifice some of your money to help those less fortunate than you or to support the proclamation of the Gospel throughout the

world even though it means less money for you to spend on yourself. You have the opportunity to gather weekly or more with your fellow Christians around Word and Sacrament to be encouraged and to encourage others even though it means sacrificing some of your sleep, relaxation, or work time. Do you rejoice in the opportunity to sacrifice in those ways or does it feel like a burden to sacrifice in those ways? At times like this you need to let Romans 5 pour all over you. **“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us”** (Romans 5:6-8). That changes everything! When you really ponder the totally undeserved sacrifice that Jesus made on your behalf so you might enjoy all the blessings Romans 5 talks about, that can't help but make you joyful and willing to make such sacrifices out of thankfulness.

Jesus asked the question in our Gospel lesson today – **“What good is it if a person gains the whole world yet forfeits their soul”** (Mark 8:36)? Jesus knows that if he allows us to have an easy, comfortable, selfish life on this earth each of us will forfeit our souls and spend eternity in Hell. That's why he sends each of us a balanced life. Spend some time this week allowing Romans 5:1-11 to pour all over you as you come face to face with God not just telling you that he loves you, but demonstrating that he loves you as he directs your eyes to your Savior Jesus. Jesus changes everything! And with eyes focused on Jesus, God the Holy Spirit will change your grumbling, complaining, and selfishness into willing, joyful, and thankful compliance to God's plan for your life that will include some sacrifice and suffering. Amen.