

Sermon for Sunday, June 12, 2022
Romans 5:1-5

Present Tense Salvation

Friends, I have some good news for you this morning. You and I have been justified by faith! Isn't that awesome?

Granted, if you're like me, you may not be exactly sure what that even means. But as I learned this past week, when Paul uses that word "justified" (and he uses it a lot, especially in Romans, where he uses it 15 times) what he is talking about is actually very simple: it means being right with God. Or we could say, in its passive sense, being "made right" with God. That is awesome!

The crucial question, for Paul and for us, is what do we have to do to be right with God? What makes us right with God?

For at least half of the people Paul was writing to, the answer to that question was, obeying the Torah. Of course, that would be the Jews that believed that way. That's no easy thing; there are something like 613 individual laws in the Torah. But if you want to be right with God, you have to follow the Torah.

Okay, but what about the other half of the people Paul was writing to. What about the non-Jews—or as he typically calls them, the Gentiles? Do they have to follow the Torah? Do they have to get circumcised, and obey all the cleanliness laws, including what they can and cannot eat? Do they have to only eat meat that comes from animals with cloven hooves and that chew their cud? That's what the Torah says.

No! Says Paul, the Jewish Pharisee. It is not following the Torah that makes us right with God. (Which is a good thing, because you can't do it, no matter how hard you try.) No, it is Jesus who makes us right with God. All of us. Jews and Gentiles. Mennonites and non-Mennonites.

Speaking of Mennonites, did you know that we are sometimes accused of "works righteousness," of having our own version of the Torah, of thinking that it is not what we believe that justifies us, but what we do? And that criticism has some validity. Because we do place strong emphasis on "following Jesus" in the way we live our lives. And we sometimes forget that it is not how we live that makes us right with God. Jesus himself has already made us right with God. He is our bridge, we could say, our ambassador, our ticket to salvation. There is nothing we can do to lose it. And there is nothing we can do to earn it. We are all already in. All of us. Thank goodness!

But that's not all that Paul is saying here. In fact, that's not even the main focus of this morning's passage. He starts there, but he doesn't end there.

Paul starts by saying, "*Therefore, since we are justified by faith . . .*" And then he goes on to tell us about the consequences of being justified by faith. And that's the real good news. You could call it "Present Tense Salvation."

First, Paul says, "*we have peace with God.*" It would be hard to overemphasize just how good this news is. Imagine yourselves at odds with God, or more strongly and graphically, at war with God. Imagine feeling that God is against you. Because you're not good enough—that all your sins are like a heavy millstone around your neck. That you're doomed to perish.

Now imagine Jesus himself coming to you and taking that millstone off of your neck. And then imagine God saying, “You are good enough. I love you. Just as you are.” That’s precisely what Paul is saying in verses 1-2. “*We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand.*” Remember that one of the literal meanings of the word “grace” is “free gift.” In other words, we have peace with God . . . and, it’s for free!

But that’s just one of the gifts of our salvation in the present tense. Second, since we are justified by faith, we also have hope. Or as Paul says, “*we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.*”

Let’s face it: life can get downright difficult sometimes. Sometimes we, or our loved ones, get cancer. And for all of us, these bodies of ours wear out a bit each day we’re alive. Sometimes we run into snags or difficulties at work. Sometimes we get way too much rain. Or, not enough rain. Sometimes the temperatures reach triple digits with 90% humidity. Sometimes it can seem as if life itself is against us.

Even so, since we have been permanently made right with God, we now have hope. Paul even explains how it works. “*Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us.*” In other words, hope is not merely wishful thinking for something good that may or may not happen. Even amidst our difficulties and suffering, hope is confidence, hope is certainty that all will be well. In fact, all is already well. That’s something we should think about a lot. That’s something we should think about every day!

Third, the reason hope does not disappoint us but instead is proof of our “present-tense salvation” is that “*God’s love has been poured into our hearts.*” I’ve asked Josh to show again *the picture* we saw at the beginning of the service, with a beautiful sunset or sunrise in the background, and in the foreground a mighty wave. That’s God’s love pouring into our hearts!

I’m reading a book by C.S. Lewis entitled *The Four Loves*. And in this book he talks about how in our lives there are different kinds of loves. There is “need-love” and “gift-love.” There is the love of affection, the love of friendship, there is erotic love, and the love of what Lewis calls charity. But in addition to that—and the kind of love Paul is talking about here—there is God’s own love—a powerful, pure love. And that is what makes all the difference. Having God’s own love poured into us is what makes it possible to love not just our friends, but our enemies; not just those we like, but those we don’t really like. Human love is wishy-washy, fragile, unsteady. God’s love is dependable, strong, steady.

There is just one problem. God is way up there, and we are way down here. God is huge and eternal; we are tiny and time-limited. How is God’s heavenly, holy love going to get way down here into our earthly, human hearts? Paul tells us how, in verse 5. He says, “*God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.*” Of course! The Holy Spirit! Which we received at Pentecost, and which is breathed into us any time we ask! And the Holy Spirit brings God’s love right along with it. That’s right, we already have it. It’s yet one more part—and I’d say it’s the best part—of our present-tense salvation. Good news? You better believe it!

Granted, the future is still be beyond our eyesight. We don’t know what all it may hold. But one thing we can be certain of: it is firmly in God’s hands.

Hallelujah, and amen!

Our final song, which is again a camp song, is about this present-tense salvation that is ours to enjoy. "Give me joy in my heart."

*Give me joy in my heart, keep me praising.
Give me joy in my heart, I pray.
Give me joy in my heart, keep me praising.
Keep me praising 'til the break of day.*

*Sing hosanna, sing hosanna, sing hosanna to the King of Kings.
Sing hosanna, sing hosanna, sing hosanna to the King.*

Give me peace in my heart, keep me loving (etc.)

Give me love in my heart, keep me serving (etc.)

Now, there are lots of verses to this song that have been added through the years. Who has one to suggest?

*Give me gas in my Ford, keep me trucking for the Lord (etc.)
Give me salt on my frito, God is neat-o, neat-o, neat-o (etc.)
Give me umption in my gumption, help me function, function, function (etc.)*