

“If only we believed it” Rom 5:1-11

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

Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person-- though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die-- but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Do you know what the main message of the Bible is? The message about God’s love, the message about God’s unbelievable grace and forgiveness. The message that tells that He, indeed, loves you, each of you, and cares for you and has prepared a place for you so that you could live in His presence.

This message is so, so good. And do you know what our problem is? Our problem is that we struggle, we really struggle to believe that this message may be true. It just sounds too good. Can it really be about me?

Do you think that we are that different from the people in the first century to whom Paul wrote this letter? Sure, our situation is quite different, but we are not that different. Our brothers and sisters in Christ, to whom Paul was writing this letter were struggling with the same issues as we do. Can this be true?

These verses which we just heard are of great help and they bring us great comfort and encouragement, as Jesus’ chosen messenger, Paul the apostle, assures us that, yes, you can trust this message, it is about you, and it is true.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to us through Paul? “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

Just listen to what he says: justified by faith, have peace with God, have access into God’s grace, rejoice in hope of the glory of God. All of this is said about you, as a beloved child of God.

See, Paul speaks about all these wonderful gifts of God as about our present reality, not as about some kind uncertain promise sometimes is future. This is, what you have already now, all of this have been given to you already.

First, Paul says, you are justified by faith. All human beings know that we are accountable. Our conscience tells it every day. It testifies about the Last Day when we all will have to give an account for what we have done with the lives given to us. It is a scary reality, we have so much to fear for.

And now, Jesus Christ has taken your place, your sins, He has received what you deserve, and in exchange He offers and gives His righteousness. He says to you: “You are not guilty, you are forgiven, come into God’s presence.” Without fear, with joy. It is true already. You just need to receive this gift by faith, trusting Jesus.

Also, you have peace with God. Since the Fall there has always been enmity between rebellious human creatures and their benevolent Creator. We want to be like gods, we don’t want the Triune God to be our God.

We fight, we resist, we reject Him. But now He has come and done something we would never be able to. He has restored our relationships. He has done it. And now He has sent His Spirit into our heart, to bring again peace and trust in our relationships. It is done. Already. You have peace with God.

More, you have access into God’s grace. You have access into God’s presence. This is what this our gathering is about. Your loving Father, and your Saviour Jesus calls you out of the world into His presence.

Why? Because He wants to be with you, He wants to bless you, He wants to converse with you. Since the Fall human creatures have been separated from their Creator, for nothing sinful can come in God’s presence and remain alive.

But now, you can come in the presence of the holy God, you can receive His gifts of forgiveness and good conscience, of wisdom and protections, you can be united with Jesus in His Holy Meal. All these gifts are yours already.

And then more, you have the hope of the glory of God. This is our ultimate hope, that when our time here is over, we will see our God, we will see Him face to face as He is, and we will remain with Him forever.

All of this is true, but we just struggle to comprehend it and to believe it. Partly it is because we still experience all the problems and hardships of this life. We can think, yes, this sounds wonderful, but...

... I still have my broken relationships, others still do things that hurt me, I still have to fight losing fight for my health, costly fight at that, I am still in distress daily, for I don’t know how I will meet my financial obligation, and bills just keep coming, and I struggle with anger, and despair, and so on...

We, broken sinners, still live in this broken world and it manages to hurt us daily, from inside and from outside. Besides, we live in the world which daily grows in blind hatred more and more hostile to Christians.

In the middle of these mundane experiences from time to time you can hear about wonderful things that Jesus has done for you and what He has prepared for you.

But our daily struggles drag us down, darkness around us is too thick and this wonderful message just doesn't really sink in. It's hard to believe it. Does some of this sound familiar?

Know this, Paul wasn't a dreamer. Neither was Jesus. Paul had experienced as much hardship as all of us together. And there is no need to mention what Jesus went through so that only He could have you with Him. This is, how Paul continues.

“But we rejoice [not only in all these wonderful things, but also] in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”

Yes, we still live in this world which manages to hurt us every day. But God has given us something that changes everything. He has given us His Holy Spirit, who is with us all the time. The same Spirit in Whose power Jesus rose from the dead. What does it mean or what does it do for us?

It changes everything. You are not alone in this hostile world. Sure, sufferings come and they will as long as we are here. What do they do? For many they produce despair and hopelessness.

But for you as God's children, they instead produce endurance. How? For you know that your God would never ever abandon you. He doesn't pull us out of this world, that's right, but instead, He is with us where we are.

Endurance, with the help of the Holy Spirit, then produces character. Not bitter or pessimistic character, but joyful, trustful, peaceful character. For you know that Jesus not only is together with you, but He understands you better than you do. He has suffered whatever you may need to suffer. And He will lead you through this time and then...

... this character produces hope. Yes, the same hope which we already spoke about. The hope of eternal life with Jesus, in Paradise, seeing Him face to face. This hope is much, much greater than the sufferings of this time.

You see, it is such a privilege to be a Christian. It doesn't free us from the sufferings of this world, but we have the Son of God, who took the sufferings of the whole world upon Himself, walking with us, right next to us.

Keeping us by the power of His Spirit so that we could rejoice even in the midst of our struggles, for you are not alone, your God and Saviour is closer to you that you can possibly imagine.

But still, old Adam in us just wouldn't stop doubting. How can you know that all of this is yours? Are you really worthy of something that great? Aren't these just your dreams and wishful thinking?

If you are familiar with these doubts, then what Paul writes the next is for you. Basically, Paul makes a very simple argument. This kind of argument is called from greater to smaller: if God did this, then He will surely do that.

Listen carefully what Paul says. We were enemies of God. We were hostile to Him. We sinned against Him and deserved His wrath. In that situations, God the Father sent His only-begotten Son to take your sins and guilt upon Himself.

Jesus Christ came to us, His enemies, to receive what our sins deserve, death and God's wrath. It is done. It is finished. He justified you, He reconciled you with Himself, He brought you in His presence, when you were still His enemy.

What now? If God did all of this, this greater thing, when you were still His enemy, He will most certainly do the smaller thing, – He will have you with Him now, when you are His beloved child through Jesus.

Jesus is risen and lives. And because you are united with Him by means of the Holy Spirit, you will live too. I know, this message is too beautiful. I know that we doubt and think we may not be worthy of it.

And the fact is, we are not. But our God is incredible One. He dies for His enemies, He prays for those who persecute Him, He comes to those who reject Him and makes them His children and heirs. He does all of this for you.

I pray that the Holy Spirit who dwells with you, would help you to believe, to believe with your whole heart that you are loved by Jesus, forgiven, that He is with you whatever happens in your life and that He will have you with Him in the world to come.

Have this joy, have this peace, have this hope, have them abundantly, let them warm your heart, for this is true. Live in this joyful freedom, trusting your God, living for your neighbour, and rejoicing in the Holy Spirit. For this is true.

And the peace of God which surpasses all our understanding keep your minds and hearts in Jesus Christ. Amen.