

Into This Shared Grace

Exodus 17:1-7; Romans 5:1-11

The Third Sunday of Lent, March 12, 2023 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

Romans 5:1-2 Therefore, having been justified by faith, 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 rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

- Introduction

The first image that came to mind when I read this passage in Romans was the video of a small child desperately clinging to the side of a pool. He was crying for help because he could not swim and he thought that the water was over his head until his mother came, straightened out his legs and he realized that he was in the shallow end of the pool and the water was only chest deep. I have heard that most of our worries never actually come to pass, but I have to admit that I do not think this image is a completely fair representation of our anxieties. Sometimes they do come to pass. Sometimes the water is really that deep. Disease and mortality is very real. People can lose their jobs and have their careers and finances ruined through no fault of their own. Marriages do fall apart, as do families. Our passage for today does not ignore this. Just look a few verses from the beginning of the chapter. Verse three speaks of “tribulations,” which has the basic idea of being squeezed and is a reference to any sort of trouble or temptation, some of them quite severe. The Bible dares to tell us to glory in tribulations, of all things. They produce perseverance, character and hope, and it takes a surprisingly unanxious approach to the very troubles that we fear so much. This is not something to which we will ourselves toward. This is a work of the Holy Spirit and the basis is in the verse just before, in which the word “hope” again appears.

- Set the Stage
- Main Point

Hope in the Bible is not a possibility but a certainty

The key verses for today speak of the Christian being justified-declared righteous as if completely innocent-by faith resulting in peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ and access to this shared grace, shared with people all over the world and throughout the ages. We stand, or make our stand in this grace and hope in the glory of God, a glory that is to be revealed not to us, but through us. Remember the sermon a few weeks ago about the Transfiguration of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 17. Peter, James and John were witnesses to Jesus revealed in the glory of heaven. Not imagine that scene in which Peter, James and John shine forth in that same glory, now imagine that you are there as well. All that is in that phrase, “the glory of God.”

“Access,” as in our access to God through Jesus Christ, has in it the image of an “introduction” to royalty. One could not simply enter the court of a monarch, you had to be properly introduced. Jesus is our introduction and welcome to the presence of God. Remember the story of Esther in the Old Testament. The Jewish holy day of “Purim” celebrates her and it took place recently. In that story a man named Naaman conspired to murder every Jew in Persia, and came close to succeeding. His undoing came when he entered the throne room of the king confident in success and access only to find that the queen, Esther, was Jewish, and Naaman's welcome quickly evaporated, which came at the cost of his life. Because of Jesus, we, who are unworthy, are given access and welcome to the very throne room of Almighty God to enter every time we pray. In fact,

we are commanded to pray constantly. This was unthinkable in the Old Testament but it is the grace we enjoy today.

- Application

The application is to have confidence not in yourself, nor in your ability to overcome anxiety but in the work of the Holy Spirit and in Jesus, who is our champion who has overcome the world. You don't have to have the willpower to overcome anxiety or to face troubles with confidence and joy. You can anticipate that this is part of the Holy Spirit's work in your life. Meditate as much as you can on the words "grace" and "access." They involve privileges that we share in Christ, but will probably will never fully understand or appreciate this side of heaven. It's not where I am yet, but it is where I desire to grow.

- Conclusion

We share in a grace in Christ, one that, as we grow in the understanding of it, will cause us to face troubles in a way that would be impossible if left to our own devices. It is a grace that causes strength of joy in the face of trouble, with every challenge building character and confirming hope. Hope is not a desire in the New Testament as much as it is a certainty. Because of Christ we have a welcome access to the presence of God, a grace we share but will take forever to fully appreciate.