

'This Really is GOOD NEWS!'

by Rev. Robert Griffith

There are a number of places in the Bible where I am just overwhelmed by what I read - where I feel like I'm sitting before the greatest banquet ever served - with the richest and most nourishing spiritual food and drink laid out before me. So incredible is this feast, that I really can't believe I'm here.

The passage read to us today from Romans 5 is one of those places in the Bible where I am just in awe of what these words really mean. This passage contains the foundation of the whole Christian experience and verse 1 says it all: *"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."*

The very first thing that we should learn as a Christian is that we are justified in the eyes of God through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Being 'justified through faith' is just a fancy theological way of saying, we believe that God has forgiven us in Christ and now calls us 'son' or 'daughter'. We receive this through no merit on our part, but by faith in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is justification. Then, Paul says, when we believe God and are justified by grace, through faith, the most important revelation which comes to us is that we have peace with God, through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our belief doesn't give us peace, our faith doesn't move the hand of God to give us peace, our faith simply opens the door into heaven so we can see and experience the reality of what God has done for us in Christ. God secured our peace with Him long before we were even born. Our belief and our faith doesn't create peace with God, it simply opens our eyes to behold what has been there all along.

As we begin to see into the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of God, we realize that we have been made alive in Christ and we really do have peace with God. The war is over. The conflict between our sinful condition and God's holiness and purity has ended; we are at peace with God, now and forever!

A few of you may remember when World War II ended or you have heard about it from a relative or friend. I read the account of one man recently who was actually in Honolulu at the time and he said they had gone through the excitement and joy of VE Day some months before, when the war had effectively ended in Europe, but that was a long way from the South Pacific. They were really happy that the battles in Europe were over, but they still had a war to fight. Out in the South Pacific there were many bloody battles yet to come – some of the worst in the whole war. He said he will never forget the day it was finally announced that peace with Japan had been established. The good news that World War II had finally come to an end rang out across the world. In Honolulu the people poured out into the streets. He said there were thousands of them jamming the beaches and streets of the city, rejoicing in this good news. Peace had finally come. For the first time in many years, they could now see a bright future; they now had hope; they were finally at peace.

That is what happens in the heart of someone who truly understands that they have been reconciled to God. The war is over, they are at peace with God. This peace is not some fragile treaty or temporary peace until the next war breaks out – this peace has been secured once and for all, by the blood of God's only Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. God has declared that we are now sons and daughters, indeed, we are a friend of God.

That is a declaration of God which is not dependent upon our performance or the quality of our faith. This is the Word of God. Believe it, receive it and watch it totally transform your whole life. I remember I had a sticker on the dashboard of my very first car. It triggered many conversations. It simply read: **God said it. I believe it. That settles it!**

So what has God said? God has said that we have peace with God through Jesus Christ. It's a done deal. We don't have to make it happen. In fact, we can't make it happen. If we could have somehow made peace with God, Jesus didn't need to come. And yet, in spite of this truth, I am sure you have heard people talking about 'making their peace with God.'

Often as we reach our latter years and eternity is looming, people are told, 'You need to make peace with God.' I know it's only a phrase people use, but it's a very misleading phrase. **We can't make peace with God.** God has made peace with us already through Christ. God has reconciled us in Christ. God did what we can't do: God has declared us righteous once and for all, by the blood of Christ.

All God asks of us is to BELIEVE that – and live like that is true - then watch our lives change before our eyes as the power of that Gospel, the power of that good news, captures our hearts, renews our minds and transforms our will. When we believe that God has reconciled us to Himself through Christ, we will receive all the blessings which flow from that truth and the motivation to serve God and the desire to live a life which is consistent with our status and a son or daughter and the friend of God.

Now, I don't know about you, but I think that is simply the greatest news any human being could ever hear. Far greater than the end of World War II. Far greater than anything. This really is GOOD NEWS. This really is the gospel. And the only reason most Christians are not rejoicing in the streets and overflowing with the 'inexpressible and glorious joy' Peter talks about in his first letter, is because we have forgotten the essence of our faith or we never actually understood the magnitude of what God has done for them in Christ.

"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have (not might have, will have or have to work hard for, no) we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained (not will gain, but have gained) access by faith into this grace in which we now stand."

In the face of that wonderful declaration of peace, my heart responds the same way the Apostle Paul's did when writing to our brothers and sisters in Ephesus all those years ago:

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ ... In him we have redemption through his blood ... (in Him we have) forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that He lavished on us."

This really is GOOD NEWS. This is the gospel and the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. I don't care if you have heard it a thousand times before, you are going to hear it a thousand times more if you stick around here, because this message, this truth, this gospel, this GOOD NEWS is what makes us who we are!

This is the reason we are still here. This is the life-changing, nation-transforming message the God of this universe has entrusted to you and to me to declare to everyone around us: **You have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ .. and our loving God is waiting for all His prodigals to come home so He can throw a party to beat all parties and delight in us forever!**

That's the gospel! That's the message we have been asked to pass on to every person on this planet – especially our loved ones – especially our neighbours – and especially those we serve in the Church. Everything else we do in Jesus' name, only has meaning and real purpose if that message is delivered.

It's great for people to know that we love them and we care about them. It's even better if they know that we do that because we are disciples of Christ. But until they know that God loves them, unconditionally and sacrificed His only Son to bring them home to Him as sons and daughters ... until they hear that message ... they have not encountered the gospel and we have not fulfilled our purpose as the Church Jesus promised to build.

When The Apostle Peter looked Jesus in the eyes all those years ago and said, *"You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."* Jesus said, *"Upon that rock, upon that confession, that truth, that gospel, upon that good news, I will build my Church."* And that is the only foundation upon which Jesus will build the true Church.