

Sermon Notes

Having unpacked what it means to be “righteous by faith” (3:21-4:25), Paul goes on to examine the “life” we now live (chapters 5-8). In the opening verses to the middle section of Romans, he shares his conviction that God’s story for our lives is already written—and nobody can undo it. Exceptionally, we may even “boast of” this story as it is entirely of God’s doing and in rejoicing over this story we give Him all the glory and credit for it.

➤ #Hope

We can have the firm and bold hope that only time separates us from inheriting eternal life in God’s presence (= sharing his glory) since we have *already been justified* (= restored to the relationship with God) through Jesus. Justification is not something we have yet to earn, or something that would depend on our sanctification (according to 1 Corinthians 1:30 Christ is not only our justification, but *also* our sanctification).

➤ #Suffering

While it might be easy to accept that we can “boast because of hope (of receiving) the glory (that God gives)”, does Paul really mean that we can also “boast of our troubles”¹? Yes, since troubles are the training ground of our maturing as Christians. This does not mean that our sufferings and trials are good in and by themselves. Rather, that God can grow us through them. Furthermore, our suffering has the potential to remind us that Christ is all we need, which made Paul “boast of his weakness” already in 2 Corinthians 12:5 (written prior to Romans). Hence, while it is of course perfectly right to ask God to deliver us from difficult circumstances, we may also want to pray: ‘Lord, as long as I have to suffer in or from this circumstance, use it to grow my character.’ Or: ‘Lord, in my trials show me that your strength is overflowing and you are all I need.’

➤ #Love

Whenever we have doubts that this is really the story God has written over our lives, we are invited to look at the cross, where Jesus died “*for us*” (Romans 5:8). Eventually, we are invited to even “boast of God” for what He has done (Romans 5:11)!

Questions for Discussion

- 1 If you look back at the last years (or months) of your life, how would you have described the story of your life prior to listening to Paul’s message. In similar terms or differently? How do you feel affirmed or challenged by it?
- 2 How easy do you find it to believe that you have already been justified through Jesus?
- 3 Read 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 as Paul’s own commentary on his claim in Romans 5:3. Summarise the punch line of Paul’s thoughts with your own words.
- 4 When you look at difficulties in your current life, are there situations you feel challenged to approach differently? Share in groups of 2-3 if that is easier.
- 5 Pray for one another. Specifically, if you sense you have been held captive by a difficult situation and your negative approach to your suffering or troubles, ask the others to pray for you, so that you can believe anew that when you are weak Jesus is strong in you.

¹ As the GNT puts it, literally rendering what Paul is indeed writing.