

Romans, Part 26 12-11-22

Exulting Mucho Mas

Romans 5:**6-11** *For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. ⁸But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. ¹⁰For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. ¹¹And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation. This is the word of the Lord.*

And this is the final message from Romans for 2022. Next week Beth and I are away in Florida. Then we come back to Christmas. If the Lord so leads, we will pick up in the middle of Romans 5 starting on January 8, 2023. But here we are just two weeks before Christmas, the celebration of the coming of Christ. And, although Romans 5 is hardly a traditional Christmas text, it does take us to the heart of the gospel and reminds us beautifully and powerfully why we do celebrate the birth of a Savior.

Last time we looked at verses 6-8 and we move on from there to concentrate on the next three verses which continue on the same theme of our great salvation through the grace of Jesus. And since it is Christmas we will approach the exposition of these verses as we would the opening of gifts on Christmas morning. Does that sound exciting?! Christmas day is fabulous for many of us because we have the pleasure of opening gifts and then a big celebration meal. That's the plan for us over the next twenty minutes or so. And gift #1 that we get to open is there in verse 9 *Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.* Much more then. This reminds me of the late-night 30 minute infomercials, where we are told that for only \$29.95 you get the complete set of kitchen knives and then, the salesman says, *but that's not all.* And he goes on to tell us what else comes with our purchase. *Wait, there's more!* Much more then. *Entonces, mucho mas* – would be the Spanish version which I like better. We already have been told that Jesus died in our place as a proof of God's love and as the way to our justification. We who have read Romans are getting familiar with justification. It means that God declares us righteous, just, sinless. The catechism says, *Justification is an act of God's free*

grace, wherein He pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ, imputed to us and received by faith alone. Is that a good gift? That is the greatest gift of all. And that justification has come to us only through the death of Jesus. Here it says *by His blood*. But, for us today, justification is the understood predicate to the other gifts we are about to open. We opened justification already – like on Christmas Eve, so that on Christmas morning Paul can say, *having been justified*. *Having been justified* – that is now our understood reality, so that when he says *much more*, the apostle is building on that foundation. The actual first gift for today is salvation from the wrath of God. When we are asked what are we saved from – what might some good answers be? There are plenty of them. Sin, Satan, futility, hell. Death. How about wrath? How about God? How about the wrath of God. Verse 9 says we shall be saved from the wrath of God, which is death forever, eternal banishment. We were under wrath – but thankfully, wonderfully, that wrath did not exclude God from loving us. He loved us even when His justice burned against us. And so, He made a way for us – how? Look at the prepositions in our passage. It is all right there. Verse 9 says *through Him*. Verse 10 says *through the death of His son*. Verse 11 says *through the Lord Jesus Christ*. This is the gospel – we are saved from the wrath of God by the One whom God sent for us – namely Jesus. Remember the pronouncement of the angel to Joseph? You shall call His name *Jesus* for He shall save His people from their sins – and from the wrath those sins deserved.

So, that is our first Christmas gift to open – salvation from wrath by Jesus. Great start – but oh, there's more! Mucho Mas. Our second gift to open is reconciliation. Has anyone asked for that for Christmas? Reconciliation is the relational element of the gospel, whereas salvation from wrath addresses the judicial element, reconciliation concerns the bringing together of two who were apart, even enemies it says. 10a *For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His son*. Paul has already made clear that this is our reality as redeemed believers. We were in the enemy camp. Now we are in the friends camp. And we got there via twelve steps that the priest outlined for us. Is that it? Oh no! Again, the salvation from wrath comes by Christ, and so too does the reconciliation. Specifically, these things come through the powerful and strategic death of Jesus on behalf of sinners, who were hostile to the Lord. The payment made by Christ eliminates the grounds for offense and the grounds for shame. That payment is joined with the renewing work of the Holy Spirit in a soul, so that one who formerly despised Christ, now loves Him and appreciates what He

has done to secure our reconciliation to the father and our entrance into the family of God.

I could imagine that the most precious gift some of us could give to another this Christmas is the gift of reconciliation. We say to a parent, a sibling, a child – you are forgiven. The relational distance is no more. Is there anyone like that in your life? To whom you could draw near? From whom you might take away an offense and a barrier? That is gospel love. A reconciling love that is offered to the unworthy. What a gift that is!

But, yet, there's more! Mucho Mas. Gift number 3 to open is salvation by the life of Jesus. Hmm. We don't so much think about ourselves being saved by Jesus' life. We know we are saved by His death. But how does His life save us? Well, one way is that, as a human Jesus kept the law perfectly, fulfilled the law, met the demands of the Father. His righteous, indeed, perfect life is a crucial part of the redemptive story. But – I don't think that is what Paul has in view here. I say that, in part, because of the verb tense in verse 10 where it speaks of the future. *We shall be saved by His life*. One important understanding we need as we read the New Testament is that our salvation has past, present and future elements to it. We have been saved from our guilt, we are being saved from the power of sin, we will be saved from death and this present evil age. Jesus did the first by His death. He does the second by sending the Spirit. He does the third by governing the universe from His throne in heaven. Where is Jesus now? Not in Mary's womb. Not in the manger. Not in Gethsemane or Calvary or the tomb. He is in heaven at the right hand of the Father, ruling over the world. All things have been subjected to Him. And what is He doing? He is ruling yes, but also saving, yes, and interceding for His people. He actively functions as our mediator. Who is directing the course of history? Jesus tells us to find comfort in knowing that He is. This is the point of the book of Revelation. Jesus is on the throne now. Some day all will recognize that. You and I can right now celebrate that. Our Savior lives! Our Savior reigns! Our Savior is directing all things for our good so that our future salvation, our deliverance from all our enemies is assured by His life and reign. That means assurance is ours. Because He lives, we can face tomorrow. Because He lives we will be kept in faith. Because He lives, no one can snatch us from His hand. He loves us at our worst, so nothing we do can surprise Him or change His mind about us. All of this escorts us into Assuranceville -- By His death, yes, but also by His living – we shall be saved. Hallelujah! What a gift! What a set of gifts – Salvation from wrath by Jesus. Reconciliation by His death. Future salvation by His life.

So, there we have it. Gift opening time is over. Now what? Well, what else do you do on Christmas day? You open your gifts and then you celebrate. You feast. You exult. Yea, that is the Biblical word – exult. Verse 11 says *Not only this, but we exult in God*. John Piper says that preaching from the Bible should be expository exulting. I like that and hope you know I am doing that as I teach Romans. Have you exulted today? Have you? In the last hour? Are you exulting now in your heart as you ponder again these extraordinary gospel realities? You may know Philippians 4:**4** *Rejoice in the Lord, always, again I say rejoice. Always it says. Or just when the gospel promises are true. Well, that's the same. If you rejoice in the Steelers your rejoicing won't be always. If you rejoice in your family your rejoicing won't be always. If you rejoice in your political party your rejoicing won't be always. It is only always when it is in the unchanging gracious Lord. Oddly enough, this gospel-based exulting does not seem incompatible with mourning when that is fitting. It does not seem incompatible with honest admission of sadness or grief at times. The Christian life is not represented by one emoji. Or one emotion. Christians get sad too. We mourn too. But, in the midst of our sorrows there is a deep, abiding root of joy. Paul wrote that line from a prison – Rejoice always! In all things. We exult in our future glorification. We exult in our present tribulation. We exult in our constant reconciliation.*

Obviously the most challenging context for exulting is that of tribulation. Verse 3 already told us we get to exult in tribulation. Can you imagine how frustrating that is for the devil? He purposes your trials to defeat you, discourage you, put you on the sidelines and make you quit. But there you go exulting anyway. I love the ending of the book of Habakkuk. You know about this? Habakkuk the prophet is given a terrible vision. He is allowed to see an invading army coming upon his people, upon Jerusalem even. Habakkuk 3:**16-19** *I heard and my inward parts trembled, at the sound my lips quivered. Decay enters my bones, and in my place I tremble. Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress, for the people to arise who will invade us. ¹⁷Though the fig tree should not blossom and there be no fruit on the vines, though the yield of the olive should fail and the fields produce no food, though the flock should be cut off from the fold and there be no cattle in the stalls, ¹⁸yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.* We like the last part but look at the context in which Habakkuk exults. I mean, this is some serious woe, serious trouble he saw coming. His lips quivered, his innards trembled at the thought of it. And then he described the devastation that was coming in agricultural terms. For a people like us who have never really

feared starvation either this may be hard to relate to. But he was talking about something fearful. To start with, no figs. This meant more than no figgy pudding at Christmas. Dried fruit saw them thru the winter, but Habakkuk sees no figs, no fruit at all. No oil from their olives, no wheat from their fields. No milk from their animals, no meat, nothing to eat, nothing to feed their children. It is a picture of earthly devastation. This is the dark background in which the light of verse 18 would shine so brightly. For after his three “thoughts” the prophet comes thru with a resounding “yet!” 18 *Yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.* Even when things are bleakest. How does that work? Our joy is in the Lord. This point tells us not only where we can find joy in suffering, but how. We go to God and we worship. We adore. We focus our sight on His beauty and worthiness. Chapter 3 of Habakkuk begins with the prophet coming before the Lord. That’s the turning point in so much. It ends with a prayer that is God-centered. It’s not focused on his pain. That pain is real and not to be ignored but his focus was on God’s love, God’s glory and God’s plan. You think maybe that is how Habakkuk gained perspective? When you are imploding inside – worship! Okay, how does singing some old dry songs, and saying a prayer, and listening to a sermon supposed to help? You got a point. Not just any old worship will do. It must be worship in spirit and in truth. Your soul has to be engaged. Your emotions must be involved. No other kind of worship will do you any good.

The most emotional season of my life, by far, was the fall of 2006, especially October, when I laid down my pastorate of 24 years. I was devastated and crushed. When I stood before our church on October 22 to announce my resignation, I wept my way thru my comments. And at the end, we sang and we worshipped God with the Matt Redman song which he takes from the story of Job that says, *Blessed be Your name when the sun's shining down on me when the world's all as it should be. Blessed be Your name. And blessed be Your name on the road marked with suffering. Though there's pain in the offering. Blessed be Your name. You give and take away. But blessed be your name!* For me, in the Fall of 06 and in the months that followed, my salvation emotionally was found in an upper room at my house where I grieved my loss and worshipped God...with passion. One hymn was especially important to me. *I Stand Amazed in the Presence of Jesus the Nazarene and wonder...? Wonder what? Wonder how He could allow this to happen to me His faithful servant?!! No, no. And wonder how He could love me, a sinner, condemned unclean. Oh, how marvelous, oh how wonderful and my song shall ever be, Oh how marvelous, oh how wonderful is my*

Savior's love for me. In singing this I was seeking to hold my Savior's love close to my soul's vision. I like a version of the hymn sung live at a concert. I love it! On the final stanza the singer begins, *when with the ransomed in glory, His face I at last shall see.* At this point in the concert the audience just bursts out in applause and rapturous praise. And I have listened to that over and over again, thinking, the people at that concert got it. They were holding the love of Jesus so close that nothing else mattered, the future bliss of heaven was real to them, and in that there is reason for exultation and rejoicing even when the fig tree does not blossom. What is the sphere of holy joy? It is in the Lord, the God of our salvation, to whom we draw near in worship.

So, Paul says to us in verse 9 – Much more. We find it again in verse 10. Much more. Mucho Mas! And in verse 11 – not only this. We have opened our presents, we now will feast on the mercies of our King and his rich treasures. May God enable us to worship and find strength in the joy of the Lord in whom we exult once again.