

# IT WAS FINISHED UPON THAT CROSS

*Romans 5:1-8*

## INTRODUCTION

I've been preaching through the Gospel of Matthew for quite a while now. Last week, we started Matthew 27. There are only 28 chapters, so we are in the final stretch. I've been tremendously blessed in our time in Matthew, and I pray that you have been as well.

Now, today is Palm Sunday, and next week is Easter Sunday, but we're not quite there in Matthew, which left me with a couple of options. One option would have been to jump ahead to those passages in Matthew and then, after Easter, go back and cover what we missed. But the Scriptures are not just a collection of stories; they have a logical flow that sets the context. To take them out of order in that way makes understanding them much more difficult.

The other option is what I've chosen to do: address Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection in other passages and then return to Matthew and cover them again when Matthew gets to them.

So that's what we're going to do. This morning, we will consider the outcome of the crucifixion of Jesus – what the cross of Jesus accomplished for us – from Romans 5:1-8.

Next week, we'll consider the outcome of the resurrection of Christ and the impact of it on our lives and this fallen world, and we'll do that from Romans 5:9-10 and elsewhere.

Let's pray and then turn to Romans 5:1-8. In Romans 5:1-5 the Scripture describes the benefit Christians have in Jesus Christ, and in Romans 5:6-8 we see *how* that benefit was obtained.

## WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR US

*Romans 5:1-5*

**1** Therefore, having been justified by faith,

we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,  
2 through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith  
into this grace in which we stand;  
and we boast in hope of the glory of God.  
3 And not only this, but we also boast in our afflictions,  
knowing that affliction brings about perseverance;  
4 and perseverance, proven character;  
and proven character, hope;  
5 and hope does not put to shame,  
because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts  
through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.  
**(Romans 5:1–5, 2022 LSB)**

Paul begins with the established fact of justification by faith. In the book of Job, a man named Bildad asks the most important question a sinner can ask:

**4 How then can mortal man be right with God?  
Or how can he be pure who is born of woman?  
(Job 25:4, 2022 LSB)**

Most people never think about this question; it doesn't make sense to them. Most people believe that they are good or that they have good hearts. They know within themselves that they aren't good; that's what drives so much drug addiction, alcoholism, sexual sin, psycho-therapy, and so on.

Some answer the question, "How can mortal man be right with God?" with denial. They deny the existence of God, or of sin, or of judgment.

Some answer the question with human behavior. They think if they have the right rituals or experiences, eat the right foods (or avoid the wrong foods), obey this law or that law, perhaps suffer a little, and all will be well.

Of course, the biblical answer—which makes it the only trustworthy answer—is that people can do nothing to make themselves right with God. We are the sinners, the criminals. He is the holy and righteous Judge whose laws we have broken and whom we

have offended. Yahweh must make us right with Himself; we are powerless to do anything for ourselves.

The good news – the Gospel – is that He has done exactly that. He sent His Son to die as a substitute, taking the place of sinners under the judgment of God.

Even historically, Jesus did not die on His own cross but on one built for Barabbas. Barabbas, in turn, was given the freedom that Jesus deserved when Pontius Pilate gave him his freedom.

But more importantly, from a biblical and spiritual point of view, Jesus took the judgment of God meant for His people. He died on *my* cross; He suffered the judgment of God meant for *me*. As Isaiah 53:4-5 says, Jesus bore my griefs and carried my sorrows. He was pierced through for my transgressions, He was crushed for my iniquities, the chastening for my peace fell on Him, and by His wounds, I am healed.

If all that Jesus did on the cross was to ensure that I would go to heaven and not hell when I die, then it would be more than I could ever have hoped for. But He has done so much more for us. Romans 5:1-5 lists the benefits we have in Him.

But the cross of Jesus doesn't simply mean that sinners go to heaven instead of hell when they die. Paul lists some of the benefits in Romans 5. I'll point them out to you.

**We are justified by faith.** To be justified means to be declared by God to be righteous even though we are still in a sinful state. The Latin phrase from the Reformation is *simul iustus et peccator*, which means “at the same time righteous and a sinner.”

If we were in charge of justification, it would probably look like this. We would begin by working on a person's attitudes and behavior. We would get them to stop cussing, maybe, or correct them when they were critical of other people. We would try to get them to cultivate good habits – reading their Bible, praying, going to church, giving, and things like that. We would probably create a checklist so they could see how they did each day. Then, when they were getting the checklist done every day for a while, we would tell them, “I'm going to declare you provisionally justified, but remember, if you mess up, you won't be justified anymore.” If they messed up, they would have to start the checklist all over

again, maybe with some added penalties to remind them not to mess up anymore. When they died, we would go through their daily checklists and add them up, and if they were really worthy of it, we would glorify them.

Do you know something? That's exactly how many human religions approach justification! They start with sanctification (which they make completely our responsibility). They define justification as some sort of reward for achieving the right level of sanctification. Then, they promise them glory if they really deserve it.

But it's not what God does. He starts with the legal declaration that we are righteous in His eyes. Then He begins sanctifying us (it's not our work, but His), transforming us over time by the power of His Spirit. And He guarantees our glorification at death. This is a human tradition or theological conclusion; it's what He says in His Word:

**29** Because **those whom He foreknew**,  
He also **predestined** to become conformed to the image of His Son,  
so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers;  
**30** and those whom He **predestined**, He also **called**;  
and those whom He **called**, He also **justified**;  
and those whom He **justified**, He also **glorified**.  
(Romans 8:29–30, 2022 LSB)

Foreknown. Predestined. Called. Justified. Glorified. The golden chain of redemption. Unbreakable. Perfect. Complete. Notice that sanctification is not mentioned. Logically, it would take place between justification and glorification. But the truth is that the entire process is sanctification, the means by which God sets someone apart and makes them eternally His own.

**Justification** brings us **peace with God**. God is hostile toward sinners. **The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness** (Romans 1:18). **God is a righteous judge and a God who is angry with the wicked every day** (Psalm 7:11, NKJV). It's no good saying that God hates every sin but loves every sinner; on the day of judgment, He will punish all *sin* by sentencing all unrepentant, unbelieving *sinners* to hell. But when we believed in Jesus, God justified us, and He is now at peace with us.

We are justified by faith in Jesus and have peace with God through Jesus, and through Jesus, we also **have continual access to the grace in which we stand**. Jesus doesn't merely let us come into the throne room when we need to; He has moved us into the throne room of God. Christians are *in Christ*, and Christ is in the throne room; therefore, we live in the throne room of Yahweh. We live *in grace*.

And so, we **boast in hope of the glory of God**. The glory of God was always a terrifying reality. Yahweh wouldn't permit Moses to see His glory. "No man can see My face and live" (Exodus 33:18, 20). Moses couldn't enter the Tabernacle while the glory of God filled it (Exodus 40:34-35). When Solomon's Temple was dedicated, the glory of God drove the priests out (First Kings 8:11).

But **we boast in hope of the glory of God** because, having been *justified by God* and *being at peace with God*, we have *nothing to fear* from God!

Now, wouldn't all this be enough?

I am a guilty sinner, fully deserving of hell, but God has declared me righteous on the basis of my faith in Jesus Christ.

I was born under God's judgment, the object of His divine wrath—Ephesians 2:3 says I was a child of wrath—but when He justified me, I became the object of His peace.

My sin makes me unworthy of His presence, but because of His grace, I live in His throne room in Jesus Christ without fear.

Isn't that enough? It would be enough for me, but it wasn't enough for God. There is so much more!

Because we are justified sinners who are at peace with God and stand firmly and fearlessly in His grace in Christ, **we boast in our afflictions**. No one in the world does that. But in Christ, we do because **afflictions** only increase our **perseverance**. And here's the thing: there is no downside to **perseverance**. On the contrary, **perseverance** deepens our **proven character**, that is, our Christlikeness. And **Christlikeness**, as it turns out,

magnifies our **hope**. Not just hope for its own sake, but specifically, **hope in the glory of God**.

We long for our sins to be removed and replaced with holiness. We long for our weakness to be replaced with Christlike strength. We long to be free of our sinful thoughts, attitudes, and tendencies.

And just as much, we long for what the Lord's prayer has us say: **Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven**. (Matthew 6:10). We long for the evil and the rebellion of the world to be put down and eliminated and replaced with righteousness and worship.

So the glory that terrified Moses, Aaron, and the priests of Israel, the glory that no one can see and live, is the very thing we hope for most.

Why do we not fear or run from God's glory? Our hope in it won't disappoint us or cause us to be ashamed because God's love for us has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, **who was given to us**. This is not love *for* God but the knowledge and awareness of God's love for us. Because of His love, we don't need to fear the fullness of His glory, even though it means judgment and destruction for the wicked. That love is an objective reality. That means it is true even when we don't feel it. We don't need to fear the refining fires which purify us because we are loved by God and have a place with Him for all eternity.

Now, what does all of this have to do with Jesus' death on the cross?

Everything!

## THE CENTRALITY OF THE CROSS

*Romans 5:6-8*

**6** For while we were still weak,  
at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.  
**7** For one will hardly die for a righteous man,  
though perhaps for the good man  
someone would dare even to die.

**8** But God demonstrates His own love toward us,  
in that while we were yet sinners,  
Christ died for us.  
**(Romans 5:6–8, 2022 LSB)**

That little word “**for**” means that the Scripture is going to explain what it just said. How is it possible for us to be justified, have peace with God, live by grace in the throne room of God, boast in the certain hope of His glory, boast in our sufferings, grow in perseverance, become more like Jesus, and eagerly long for God’s glory to be manifested? Because the Holy Spirit has brought the truth of God’s love for us into our hearts.

And what is the nature of that love?

Well, while we were still weak, still ungodly, still sinners, still under the grip of our fallen nature, still at war with God’s holiness and goodness and sovereignty, still demanding our own pleasures and wisdom and rights, Christ died for us. Jesus didn’t delay His death until we proved that we were worthy of Him. He died for us when we were still weak, ungodly sinners.

Romans 5:8 says that God demonstrates – present tense – His love for us in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Imagine the best person ever being arrested and condemned to death on, say, a cross. Imagine that you are there in the crowd, watching Him drag His cross up that hill. Imagine that you know in your heart that He is utterly innocent of any wrong and has certainly never done anything that deserves execution. Imagine that you see them lay Him down on the cross and prepare to drive the spike through His flesh and into the wood. Would you step forward and say, “No, don’t, I’ll take His place”? No? Don’t feel too bad; the disciples didn’t, either.

Now, imagine instead the worst killer the world has ever known, the most brutal, profane, sadistic, evil man to ever live, facing the same sentence of death. It might be Charles Manson or Adolf Hitler. It might be Jack the Ripper or Ivan the Terrible. It might be Ted Bundy or Jeffrey Dahmer. You watch the process take place, but imagine that just as they prepare to drive the spike through his flesh into the wood, the man standing next

to you says, “No, don’t, I’ll take his place.” And He takes off His white robe of righteousness that gives Him unhindered access to the grace and favor of God, takes the condemned killer’s filthy, wretched robe and puts it over His own shoulders, and then willingly lays down to be crucified.

That’s what Jesus Christ did. His death on the cross is the greatest possible demonstration of the love of God. God proved His own love for us in that while we were still sinners under His condemnation, Christ died for us.

The Bible says that God is love (First John 4:8). God declares His love in many places (Jeremiah 31:3). It should be enough that God IS love. It should be more than enough that God declares His love. But He did so much more. He demonstrates His love in the death of Jesus for us. He proves His love. He shows His love in a specific way. Jesus Christ died for sinners.

## **BRINGING IT HOME**

This entire sermon has been applicational, and so the bringing it home section is pretty small. Let me point out the questions I’ve put on your sermon note sheet.

First, are you fully convinced that the Father has justified you once and for all time in Christ? If not, confess your unbelief and ask Him for the confidence to trust Him completely.

Second, boasting in afflictions is counter-intuitive and certainly counter-cultural. Can you look back to times of suffering and see how they increased your perseverance, character, and hope?

Third, think about the depth of God’s love demonstrated on Jesus’ cross. How does that truth affect your trust in His ongoing love for you?

Fourth, how can you best share the truth of God’s love for sinners with others?

Let’s pray!