

## What assurance do we have today that we'll be okay when we die?

October 18, 2009 - Romans 5:1-11

### Romans 5:1-11 NIV

#### ***Peace and Joy***

<sup>1</sup>Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup>through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup>Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup>perseverance, character; and character, hope. <sup>5</sup>And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

<sup>6</sup>You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup>Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. <sup>8</sup>But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

<sup>9</sup>Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! <sup>10</sup>For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! <sup>11</sup>Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

“What protection do you currently have to ensure your family would be okay financially if you suddenly died?” That’s the question a financial advisor asked me recently. He wanted to do a review of our current situation just to lay out clearly where we’re at. So we talked about life insurance, critical illness insurance, disability

coverage and mortgage insurance. You can get insurance for almost anything.

But it’s kind of a strange conversation. You have to think about the timing of your death or some grievous incapacitating illness. Now I placed some importance in this question. I don’t have life threatening health problems that I’m aware of. I am not approaching the average age of death. I don’t live a high risk lifestyle like some of you do like riding a motorcycle or ice fishing on thin ice or hunting. I don’t really like thinking about death. But I need to think about it occasionally and will probably think about it more as I age.

Now say a financial advisor came to you and asked “what assurance do you have today that you’re family will be okay when you die?” I suspect the amount of importance you place on that question depends on your assessment of how close you are to death. If you’re a young person or 20 something, you likely think death is 60 years away. So why would you even think about this? If you’re 30 something you might think about it a little more especially if you have kids or loved ones you’re caring for. If you’re part of the young middle aged crowd like me at 46 with children, you might think about

it even more. And if you're part of the really old crowd, anyone 47 and older, you might think about it a little more. The closer we get statistically to death, the more weight you might place on this issue.

The same can be true spiritually. Imagine I'm your spiritual advisor coming to visit you this morning. I also have a question that is similar yet has one important difference. See if you can pick out the difference. "What assurance do you have today that you'll be okay when you die?" Did you catch the difference? I'm not asking if you're family will be okay. I'm asking if you'll be okay.

The Good News this morning is **God provides great assurances that true Christians will be okay when we die.** But now I face the same dilemma any financial advisor faces in trying to get people to take this question seriously. The value you place on this assurance may directly depend on how close or far you believe you are from death. That value dictates whether or not you will listen over the next minutes.

Assurance matters a great deal for Christians facing imminent death. It matters a great deal for Christians who have loved ones facing death. It matters a great deal for Christians who have deceased

loved ones. But does that mean the rest of us need not pay close attention to the assurance God provides?

I assure you that assurance matters even if your death is 70 years away. Your struggles in life today might have their root in lack of assurance about God and His salvation. You might be convinced you can never find peace with God. You might be going through a time of suffering. You're wondering about God's love and purpose through it all. You might think God doesn't love you. Or you might be wondering if God might turn from you and reverse your salvation because of some sin you've done. These same obstacles might prevent you from living out a Jericho Road lifestyle that have roots in lack of assurance.

So please don't tune me out because you think this has nothing to do with you today. This has everything to do with today. God has a great gift to offer you through His Word.

We find these great assurances in our continuing study of the Book of Romans. Remember Paul, the author, starts by declaring that this letter is about – the Gospel. In Romans 1:16 he states – "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation

for everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.” Then Paul describes the problem in Romans 1:18-3:20. Everyone, Gentile and Jew apart from Christ, is under sin and under God’s wrath. Romans 3:21-26 describes the solution God provides. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” All who believe in Christ, God will justify or declare to be in right standing before Him. How could God do this? He put forward Jesus as a propitiation, a sacrifice of atonement that bore God’s wrath to the end. On the cross, Jesus bore the wrath of God due sinners. When anyone puts their trust in Jesus, God applies that sacrifice to their account.

The last time we looked at Romans, we saw Paul use Abraham as an example that this justification from God came through faith alone. This is not a salvation by works or merit. It totally depends on what Christ did on the cross. Now in chapter 5, the letter turns. Paul begins to flesh out the effects or outcomes of justification. The first one involves assurance.

So remember the central truth: God provides great assurances to true Christians that we’ll be okay when we die. First, we’re going to define 3 phrases in that statement: Assurances; True Christian and

Okay when we die. Then we’ll look at the assurances Paul describes in this passage. As we look at each assurance, I will give you what affect it can have on life today and how it can help with Jericho Road living today. Finally, we will have a time of response to God and His Word.

### **Definitions**

God provides great assurances to true Christians that we’ll be okay when we die.

**Assurance:** The act of assuring; the state of being assured. Assure – To inform confidently with a view to remove doubt; To cause to feel sure; convince; To give confidence to; to reassure. AssuranceS – implies more than one assurance. I chose the plural because there are multiple ways God assures Christians through this passage.

### **True Christian.**

Someone who trusts Christ and His sacrifice completely to protect them from God’s wrath.

Someone who puts their faith in Christ for the forgiveness of sins and through that faith is justified by God.

Someone upon whom God pronounces the verdict “not guilty forever” because they trusted Christ as their Savior and Lord.

Why would a true Christian need assurance? Satan works overtime to blur our confidence in God. Things happen in life that blurs our vision of God, and we may begin to doubt Him and His promises. When death really arrives, it can be terrifying. “It’s really happening to me. The passages in the Bible about the Last Day are pretty terrifying. Will we really be okay on that day? Even true Christians need assurance.

What does “**okay when we die**” mean because by definition, if you die, you’re not very okay.

We will immediately go to heaven to be with Christ in body or spirit or some kind of body/spirit. We will one day receive our resurrection bodies and be complete, okay, in our salvation; glorified, Christ-like. We will pass through the Last Day of God’s Judgment with blessing because God has already pronounced the verdict we will receive – Not Guilty. We will enter into an eternal life of blessing, joy and real life in the constant presence of God Himself.

## **What assurances does God provide so true Christians know we’ll be okay when we die?**

**Assurance #1 - God provided peace between us and Him by justifying us through faith. (1-2).** So there’s no reason to fear any hostility from God upon death.

Verse 1 states, “Therefore, since we have been justified with faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” But this verse immediately raises a question. When did we ever make war against God? Can you remember a time you woke up one day and decided, “Today, I declare war on God? I am going to live my life in such a way that I shake my fist at heaven and do all I can to oppose Him.” Most people don’t make a conscious declaration of war against God. But we were all at war with God because of our sin.

In the next part of chapter 5, Paul explains how we all came to inherit a sin nature so that we are virtually born at war with God. This same God will ultimately judge everyone. Romans 3:19 “Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth will be silenced and the whole world held

accountable to God.” We will all stand before God on the Last Day where He will determine if we turned from rebellion against Him.

But God does not approach us like a judge simply doing His job. One commentator points out the unique relationship we, the accused, have with God, the Judge. “Between the human judge and the person who appears before him there may be no personal relationship at all. The judge may feel no personal hostility to the accused if found guilty nor establish a friendship with the accused if found innocent. But between God and the sinner there is a personal relationship. We sinners stand accused before God who is both the offended party and Judge. God could have left our relationship like that. But *He* initiated the path to reconciliation. *He* provided the payment for our sins with His own sin. *He* declares the not guilty verdict when we put our faith in Christ.

Prior to our justification, we were God’s enemies. After justification, we have peace with God. This peace is not merely absence of conflict but a positive, harmonious, loving relationship. Verse 2 describes some of this process. “We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have gained access

by faith into the grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.” So Paul says “here’s a direct result of your justification. You are now at peace with God and you can rejoice in the hope of your glorification.” Remember Paul means “glorification” most of the time when he talks about salvation in Romans.

Glorification is our completed salvation when we are whole, resurrected, freed from the presence of sin and in God’s presence.

I think that’s what he’s talking about at the end of verse 2. We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. One commentator defines it this way – The hope of the glory of God is “the illumination of man’s whole being by the radiance of divine glory.” In other words we will be in God’s presence and somehow God’s glory will illumine or shine through us. So Christian, because you have peace with God, you will one day stand in the presence of the Creator of the Universe, illumined by His glory. It’s all because He made the way. He initiated the plan. He paid the penalty. You’ll be okay when you die.

What difference does this part of assurance make for **life today?** The assurance that we are “at peace with God” satisfies the quest for rest for our souls. Millions of people are on a spiritual quest.

They search for satisfaction for their souls. This is the only place they will ultimately find it. One statement I heard from a lady who came to Christ in her 50's described this well. She said simply, "In coming to Christ, the tortuous journey of my soul finally ended."

What difference does this make for **Jericho Road Living**? Well if you're running from God or making war with God, you don't have a lot of time to stop on the side of the road to help a wounded traveler. Running from God is a more than full time occupation. Making war with God is a 24/7 all consuming battle. But peace with God means the running and fighting can stop. While we're slowing down, we might actually see that person in need.

What additional assurance do Christians have that we'll be okay when we die?

**Assurance #2 - God uses our sufferings to build in us that confident certainty in our ultimate salvation. (3-5)**

Our glorification described in verse 1 is amazing and may even seem unreal. At the very least, it's as far removed from us as the day of our death. But what comfort is that assurance when we struggle

each day with various trials? What assurance do we have when we're suffering? Paul makes a particularly outrageous statement in verse 3.

"Not only so, we also rejoice in our sufferings." "What was that Paul? Rejoice in our sufferings? What are you Paul, some sort of weirdo? We don't *rejoice* in suffering. We do all we can to *escape* suffering. We do everything in our power to *alleviate* suffering.

Why on earth would you possibly say "We rejoice in our sufferings?" Because of what God can accomplish through them. Second half of verse 3 – "Because we know that suffering produces perseverance."

God can use our sufferings to build endurance or perseverance especially when it comes to waiting patiently for His return. At first this seems contradictory. A lot of times, suffering causes us to murmur against God and even curse Him. But God can use that difficulty to produce that endurance in us.

Practicing piano may not be the most exciting activity. Doing scales may not find itself on the top 10 list of vacation activities. But practicing and scales produce: Stronger hands and fingers; familiarity with a song; greater skill to play more difficult and beautiful pieces.

You don't sit down at the piano one day and play Mozart the next. It takes the suffering endurance of practice. But this perseverance is not just the perseverance of human character.

The word translated perseverance or endurance means to "remain under." It is an attitude of submission to circumstances we cannot change. This is so tough for active people. We think we can "fix everything." This patience does not come easily for people used to fixing problems. But it must come if we are to bear up through the waiting period until Christ returns.

"Well Tom, that's all well and good for serious disciplined people. But I'm not that interested in perseverance. I want to have fun." Well does character interest you? Endurance or perseverance does not complete God's purposes in our suffering. It leads to something else. Verse 4 – "Suffering produces perseverance; perseverance produces character or provedness. Paul often uses this word which described the hammering of a red hot horse shoe or plough. A blacksmith would shape and test the piece of metal on an anvil. The fire proves the metal to be a worthy horse shoe or plough.

God shapes and tests us to build in us that deepened character which looks beyond the very temporary things of this world to His kingdom. One commentator puts it this way. "Paul is reflecting on the Christian life over all. When we set out, we are often immature and shallow. In time, unfolding circumstances bring afflictions, which stubbornly remain to teach us patience. Patience in turn brings deepened character that is tried and tested, causing our eyes to look beyond this world to God's kingdom where there will be justice and no more crying or pain."

"Well Tom, I'm still not there. I don't like pain and I'm not really interested in building perseverance or character." Okay. How about hope? Does hope interest you? Does a certain hope upon which you can stake your life draw you away from your Ipod or Blackberry for a moment? Verse 4 again – "Suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character and character hope."

Now when we think of hope, we may think of something more like a wish. "I hope I win the lottery. I wish we could live in a warm climate. I wish God would come through." But Biblical hope is way stronger. Hope directed to God and His promise is certain because of

God's character. We think to hope we've got to muster up positive thinking in ourselves. We've got to go to a God pep rally to build up our confidence in God. But we have hope because of the character of God.

Yet Paul and God knew that we would still waver. We might still wonder "will God really come through? Will my hopes end up being shattered on the Last Day?" Verse 5 anticipates that: "And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us." The Message puts it this way. "In alert expectancy like this, we're never left feeling shortchanged. Quite the contrary – we can't round up enough containers to hold everything God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit." So not only has God left words of promise, He has poured out His own love into our very lives in the Holy Spirit. It's like He's saying "I promise you that your hope in my provision for the last day will not be disappointed. You can trust my promise because I have never broken one. I come through 100% of the time. But I will even give you more. I'm going to pour my love into your life through the Holy Spirit so you have a constant reminder and

presence of my love. I want to give Him to you to sustain you and your hope until the Last Day."

Through our sufferings, there is a process initiated that if responded to in the right way can strengthen our hope and assurance. The wrong way is to curse God or settle into that permanent state of mistrust we talked about a couple of weeks ago. The right way is after we've done all we can do to alleviate the suffering, come to God with the suffering. It's not wrong to ask for relief from suffering. Jesus prayed – "*Father if it is possible let this cup be taken from me.*" God may answer – often does answer that prayer. But if the answer is no, then we pray for His peace as we go through the trial. Take these difficulties and trials in your life and run closer to Christ not further away. When we grow in responding this way, we will learn to ultimately rejoice in our sufferings because we know it will somehow lead to a strengthening of our hope.

I have seen God work this process through my own life. I don't like pain nor would I choose pain. But sometimes pain through sickness or difficult situations comes. My knee jerk response used to be "let's get this over with ASAP. I'll do whatever it takes to end the

pain as quickly as possible.” But sometimes, many times that’s not God’s way.

That which God has built into me has taken time. I cannot think of one instance in my life where I lacked endurance or character in some way on Monday and miraculously had that character on Tuesday. It took long seasons of learning, praying, reflecting, responding and embracing.

I can remember in University being so unsure about Christ and my Faith, yet so sure of myself. I only believed what I could reason out. I only really trusted God for when I died. I was young, strong and capable of doing everything. I worked hard in school. I passed my courses. I had the world by the tail. I prayed only when things went bad. They were more “get me out of this” demands from God rather than prayers to Him.

I was self-sufficient and pretty self-assured. But what happens when self is not so assuring anymore? When you’re on a bed of sickness; when you don’t know what to do; when you’re exhausted and tired of life; when something goes badly; when life doesn’t fit into that neat little box, what can self assurance provide? Where do you

turn when you read Galatians 5 and see some of the fruits of the Spirit sorely lacking in life?

Self assurance doesn’t get you very far when you’re trying to comfort a family whose 15 year old son just drowned. Self assurance doesn’t dry the tears of a young man accused of murder weeping on the other side of the glass in the remand center visiting room.

Self assurance doesn’t help you explain how a former classmate could pull out a meat cleaver to threaten you when you’re just trying to help them. Or why two people on fire for the Lord and each other in one decade are now separated in another decade. Nor can it explain the agony of a man dying of bone cancer to his loving spouse.

As situation after situation like this rolled through my life, I discovered that it was only in God that ultimate assurance could be found. It was only in God and His character that people could gain peace about injustice. It was only in God and His assurance that an accused murderer could find peace. It was only in God and the assurance of His salvation that the grieving wife of the man dying from bone cancer gained hope. In life’s most desperate moments, God has shown His character, promises and assurance to be valid and true.

Oh, I still waver. It's not like I now walk through life and nothing fazes me. But perhaps less things panic me than they used to. It's not because I know the answers. It's more because I know the One who knows; the One who sees all and who has provided for my and man's greatest need in history. So I try to point people to Christ or back to Christ.

**Life today?** The assurance that God uses our suffering to build in us greater hope in Him releases us from some of the despair and doubts in suffering. *Christian*, suffering for you is not judgment. It is ultimately a reason to rejoice – not be happy but take joy in God's ability to transform something horrible into something good. So we must examine how we respond in suffering? Curse God; bitterness; despair OR hope in God; trust in His ability to take this faith-threatening moment and transform it into a faith-strengthening foundation.

**Jericho Road Living?** How can the assurance that our suffering is not meaningless help us in Jericho Road living? Well, if we are *completely blinded by our own suffering*, we will likely miss the

wounded traveler. If instead we embrace what God is doing through it, we may well have eyes wide open to those in need around us.

In the midst of suffering, we can let *despair* blind us to the wounded travelers around us. If we're not certain of our hope, why bother giving hope to someone else? But if we gain a certain hope that God ultimately will accomplish something through these sufferings, we can offer that hope to others.

If God uses our suffering to build our hope, maybe we can give up the endless pursuit to stay distracted from life's trials. Did you ever think that our culture's obsession with recreation, entertainment, vacations, the latest technology and endless hours with some video game might actually be a frantic effort to blot out the reality of our trials? I'm not saying any of these are wrong in themselves. But if we pursue them to such excess to escape, might we miss that wounded traveler beside the road?

What assurance do we Christians have that we'll be okay when we die? God has already provided peace with Himself through our justification so we can look forward to our glorification. God does not

leave us alone in our suffering. He works through them to build in us a certain hope in His deliverance.

**Assurance #3 - God demonstrated His deep love for us by showing a far greater love than even the greatest human love. (6-8)**

Verses 6-8. “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Say one of our ushers rushed in here at this moment and said, “There’s been an accident just outside the church. One of the people in the car is bleeding badly. They might die. Will someone with this particular blood type immediately give blood?” We might get several volunteers. But then say a doctor comes in and adds, “They’ve lost so much blood. It’s likely that whoever gives blood will die.” Hands might slip down. There might be one or two who would be willing to risk dying for someone in need. We would see that as a huge offer of love. But then a police officer comes in. “I just want everyone to

know, the guy who’s bleeding out is an escaped murderer who’s running from the law.” That might kill the volunteer pool for blood donation. Except if Jesus was here. His hand would still be up.

After all He held it up to go to the cross while we were still sinners. God loved us before we ever even looked at Him, longed for Him or called out to Him. “While we were still sinners!”

This assurance can make a difference in **life today**. Because some of you might believe God does not love you or never could love you. He’s already loved you and shown it through the cross. So fight off Satan’s assaults in your mind that God doesn’t love you anymore.

How might this impact **Jericho Road living**? Well, people crippled by a lonely and unloved heart don’t have much to give other wounded travelers on the road. We likely won’t reach out in love if we have no love to give or think no one really loves us. But with the assurance that God loves us in His demonstration of love before we’d done anything, we can freely reach out in love to others. God demonstrated His love and poured His love into us.

**Finally, Assurance #4 - God brought the verdict on our salvation into the present so we don’t have to worry that God will**

**get disgusted with us and cast us aside.** (9-11). “Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have received reconciliation.”

In other words, God has already provided the greater and tougher gift – Jesus’ death while we were still enemies. So now that we’re friends and reconciled, do you think God will just give up on us because we blow it? No.

The deeper you go in the Christian life, the more you become aware of the depth of sin damage. Given, what’s really deep down inside us, how can we be sure that one day, God won’t get disgusted with us and cast us aside? Growing Christians are far more aware of their sin than when they first came to Christ.

But Paul offers this assurance by pointing to history. The most difficult work has already been done. The cross is history. God did that while you were still His enemy. If He can and did do that work

when we were enemies, He will surely protect us on the Last Day when we’re His friends.

For our lives today, the assurance that God has already declared us not guilty releases us from the fear that God will one day change His mind. God doesn’t go back on His Word. We are freed from the tyranny of perfectionism and the torture of never measuring up.

For Jericho Road Living – We are released from the endless pursuit for perfection. Instead of wasting energy on getting every thing perfect, we can invest that energy in needy people around us.

We started today with the uncomfortable topic of death. But now I hope you see that God provides the greatest assurance plan that has ever been invented.

Except for those of you who don’t know Christ. Did you catch how this passage described you? A sinner, an enemy of God and destined for His wrath as long as you don’t know Christ. But God did all the work to make peace with you. He justifies those who stop depending on themselves living self assured self justified lives and instead trust Christ and His sacrifice. Will you trust Jesus today?

Christian – God’s gift of Justification has provided you with Peace with Him, a new perspective on suffering, a love beyond the best of human love and an already pronounced verdict of not guilty. Rejoice in that. Then live and look around for those He places in your path.