

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ²Through him we also have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand. And we rejoice confidently on the basis of our hope for the glory of God.

³Not only this, but we also rejoice confidently in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces patient endurance, ⁴and patient endurance produces tested character, and tested character produces hope. ⁵And hope will not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who was given to us.

⁶For at the appointed time, while we were still helpless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷It is rare indeed that someone will die for a righteous person. Perhaps someone might actually go so far as to die for a person who has been good to him. ⁸But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

⁹Therefore, since we have now been justified by his blood, it is even more certain that we will be saved from God's wrath through him. ¹⁰For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, it is even more certain that, since we have been reconciled, we will be saved by his life. ¹¹And not only is this so, but we also go on rejoicing confidently in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received this reconciliation. (EHV)

Theme: Rejoice Confidently in God

1. In the midst of hardships
2. In his grace through Christ

Confidence: is it a good characteristic, or a bad one? I suppose it could go either way; if your confidence leans toward cockiness—boasting and bragging about yourself, often at the expense of others, then it's certainly not a good characteristic to have. So is confidence that is based on yourself. And as a sinful human being, you have the tendency to do just that, to boast and brag about yourself—about who you are, your gifts and abilities, what you have or can accomplish. But as we live our lives, and as we examine ourselves according to God's Word, we eventually come to the realization that we have nothing to boast or brag about—especially before the Lord because we are nothing but sinners, unable to do anything good in our lives, especially save ourselves. That's why Jeremiah wrote—and Paul quoted twice, **let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.**

But confidence is often a good characteristic—especially when it's tied together with faith. When your confident that something is going to happen because the Lord says so, then confidence is a very good thing, a precious fruit of faith.

In our text for today we came across the term, “rejoice confidently,” three times—in verses 2, 3, and 11. The idea behind this word is to boast or to brag. It means to have a high degree of confidence in something or someone. We have a high degree of confidence in the Lord because of who he is and all that he has done for us. And so we can rejoice confidently no matter what happens in our lives.

Even when we go through hard and difficult times. Paul writes in verse three, **we also rejoice confidently in our sufferings.** This world is not an easy one to live in. If you didn't realize that before, the past year certainly underscored that fact! We suffer in one way or another because of

sin and the effects of sin in the world. We live in a world full of hate, pain, and trouble. There are viruses and diseases that causes sicknesses and death. There are financial woes, job issues, family problems. Many people are beyond stressed, depression is a big problem, as is loneliness. People are afraid to talk to each other, be near each other, or go out in public. We strongly disagree with those we used to see eye-to-eye with; close friends and family members fight and argue with each other, and then there is politics—we suffer much in this world!

We also suffer specifically because we are Christians. Jesus was perfect, and yet he suffered. And as Jesus suffered, we will too. He warned his disciples in John 15, **If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first.** And in our gospel for today, **If anyone wants to follow me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.** Chances are, we won't be murdered like Jesus. We probably won't be beaten or imprisoned like some Christians are because of our faith. But we will be mocked and ridiculed. We will be looked down upon as ignorant and gullible—some will hate us simply because of our faith. People call us intolerant of other peoples' beliefs and lifestyles. They try to force us to do things that a contrary to God's Word. We all have to carry our Christian crosses in one way or another; in other words, we must suffer for the sake of Christ. Whether it's suffering in general, or carrying our cross for Christ, we suffer much in this life.

And yet, despite all of this, we can still rejoice confidently! Paul explains, **because we know that suffering produces patient endurance, and patient endurance produces tested character, and tested character produces hope.** Last week, in our second lesson we read from the end of Romans 8, where Paul makes the point that all things work out of the good of those who love God. Somehow, in some way, God will turn our sufferings into good. Here Paul gives us some more insight. When we suffer we learn how to endure, and not just endure as in we learn how to bear up and get through it, but we learn to patiently wait for the Lord to keep his promises; and this patience will serve us well in future as we go through other troubles and difficulties. Patient endurance builds character—we become stronger individuals, able to get through the ups and downs in this life without being crushed by the waves of this world. But this isn't just any type of character, but a Christian character that also leads to hope. And our hope isn't a vain wish, as in: "I hope things get better in my life," but a sure and certain confidence because our hope is based on God's love for us.

Peter, in his first letter compares our sufferings to a refiner's fire. When we suffer, turn to the Lord in faith, and immerse ourselves in his word, our faith comes out stronger on the other side. It's as if the infirmities and weaknesses of our faith are removed when we turn to the Lord's word in times of trouble. And the end result is a faith that is more knowledgeable and trusts in him above all things! And so we can rejoice confidently even when we suffer because God uses whatever we are suffering through for our eternal wellbeing!

But there is another, more important reason, why we can confidently rejoice. It doesn't have to do with earthly, or temporary things, but spiritual. When Paul says we rejoice confidently in verse 2, it is on the basis of the hope, or sure and certain confidence, in the glory of God. This is Christ's divine glory, which he hid behind a veil of human flesh while on this earth. Now in heaven, he lives in all of his glory—not only will we see him in his full glory in heaven, but he will share his glory with us forever!

This eternal glory is ours only because of the grace of the Lord. Grace is the love that God has for us sinners, even though we don't deserve it. And grace isn't just something that is given to us by the Lord whenever we are in need of it—like a little grace here and a little grace there. But Paul says that we stand in grace. It's as if this entire sanctuary is filled grace, and we stand inside of it, and we are covered in grace—surrounded by it. It's not as if we can fall in and out of grace, we only do so when we intentionally leave behind God's grace for the things of this world.

This grace gives us access to God. We can't just waltz into the White House and go into the Oval Office anytime we want, only a select few are able to go into the President's office and talk to him. But we have access to God through Christ, and we can approach him whenever we want through prayer as little children talk to their parents!

And it is God's grace that leads him to justify us—that is to declare us guilty sinners not guilty. And this gracious declaration gives us peace. Jesus told his disciples in the upper room, **Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you.** The peace that Jesus gives is the peace that the world cannot give—it is the peace of forgiveness, the peace of mind knowing that we have been declared not guilty, that our sins aren't counted against us! We can confidently rejoice because this justification doesn't depend on us, but on God's grace; and the peace that we have doesn't come from us, but from Christ himself. And what Paul continues to talk about gives us that same reason to confidently rejoice—not in ourselves, but in the Lord! For Paul describes who we are by nature, but God's gracious response to who we are. Notice how we are described: in verse six: helpless and ungodly; in verse 8 we are described as sinners, and in verse 10, as enemies of God. We are spiritually dead by nature, unable to save ourselves, unable to do anything to please God. Paul writes in chapter 8 of Romans, **The mind-set of the sinful flesh is hostile to God, since it does not submit to God's law, and in fact, it cannot.** Our sinful nature is not able to obey God's commands, even if it wanted to, which it doesn't, our sinful nature cannot follow him. So, we are by nature helpless, unable to please God and unable to save ourselves.

This same passage helps us to see that we are truly God's enemies, or hostile to him. We weren't born as his children, but children of the devil. We weren't born morally neutral—far from it, but completely corrupt. That makes us ungodly, completely contrary to the Lord in every way.

It is important—and good—to understand just what we are by nature. Because the more realize our sin and sinfulness, the more understand just how wicked and depraved we are by nature, the more we see God's amazing grace! As Paul would say later on in chapter 5, **where sin increased, grace overflowed much more.** Grace is how God responds to our sinful and helpless state; Paul says in verse six, **while we were still helpless, Christ died of the ungodly.** Or in verse 8, **God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** Christ died for us sinners—for his enemies, For all people of all time Christ died! He did so to take away our sins, to cover them up with his blood, to give us his perfect life. And as a result, he reconciled us to God, that is, he restored our relationship with our Father. It is sin that separates us from God, but Christ removed our sin—he removed that which causes us to be separated from him, and he restores us to a right relationship with our heavenly Father. He did this for us, not for his friends, not for his family, but for his enemies! As Paul points out, someone might possibly die for a good person. You hear of heroes who run into burning buildings in order to save a child or loved one trapped inside; or a soldier who falls on a grenade in order to save his fellow soldiers. But no soldier is going to jump on a grenade to save enemy soldiers. I doubt anyone will run into a burning building that is a known crack-house. The best of what the world can do is to risk, and perhaps die for, those who we are worth saving. We aren't worth saving, we have nothing to offer God, not reason for him to die for us. But that is exactly what he did! Out of grace, he died for us his ungodly, helpless enemies!

Now, if we are saved by his death and reconciled to him by his blood; than he is most certainly going to see our salvation through. That is what Paul is talking about when he says in Philippians 1, **he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.**

If we are saved by his death, then we'll certainly have eternal life by his resurrection, which is how he crushed Satan's head, and defeated death. So that when we die, we will not perish, but we will have eternal life. And there in eternal life, we will share in his glory forever!

And so we have confidence—not in ourselves, because we are nothing but helpless, ungodly, sinners—enemies of God. But we have confidence in the grace of the Lord, who died for us, reconciling us to God, who declares us not guilty! We confidently rejoice, then in God's grace, and we rejoice in our sufferings. For no matter what happens, through faith, we'll be in heaven, where we will bask in his eternal glory. Amen.