THE GOSPEL'S GREATEST BLESSING
Joy in God through Reconciliation!

Romans Series
PBC 2025

Text: Romans 5:11; Romans 8:31-39

Romans 5:1–11 *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.* [2] *Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and* ***we rejoice in hope of the glory of God****.* [3] *Not only that, but* ***we rejoice in our sufferings****, knowing that suffering produces endurance,* [4] *and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,* [5] *and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.* [6] *For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.* [7] *For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—* [8] *but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* [9] *Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.* [10] *For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.* [11] *More than that,* ***we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ****, through whom we have now received reconciliation.*

Romans 8:31–39 *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?* [32] *He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?* [33] *Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.* [34] *Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.* [35] *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?* [36] *As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."* [37] *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.* [38] *For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,* [39] *nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Introduction:

Many people accept the gospel because of what they hope to gain from it. And what they hope for includes eternal life, a better life, hope, help, happiness, forgiveness, restoration, self-respect, and a sense of purpose or meaning in life. While all these things are true benefits that come with the gospel, they are not its primary blessing. There is something so

astonishingly beautiful and breathtaking that almost everyone misses it – the greatest reward we receive from the Gospel is God Himself!

What do you think of a statement like this one?

"The chief end of justification is the immense, glorious benefits to those to whom it is given (Eph 1:3 – "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places"). Forgiveness of sins. Imputed righteousness. Escape from hell and assured entrance into heaven. Freedom from disease. Liberation from bondage. Eternal life. Justice. Mercy. The joy of a pain-free world to come. These blessings and more become chief, compelling reasons for repenting from our sins and turning to Jesus to receive these benefits from God."

When we're asked this question in a setting like ours this morning, we instinctively sense that there's something off about the statement we just read together. Let me give you a revised version of this statement written by Pastor-Theologian John Piper in his small work, *God is the Gospel.*

"Justification is not an end in itself. Neither is the forgiveness of sins or the imputation of righteousness. Neither is escape from hell or entrance into heaven or freedom from disease or liberation from bondage or eternal life or justice or mercy or the beauties of a pain-free world (life). None of these facets of the gospel-diamond is the chief good or highest goal of the gospel. Only one thing is: seeing and savoring God himself, being changed into the image of his Son so that more and more we delight in and display God's infinite beauty and worth." (John Piper)

When I taught first-year university students, I would ask them to define "eternal life," and they consistently described it in terms of time (life that lasts a very long time) or place (heaven). Then I would ask them to turn to John 17:3, where Jesus defines and describes eternal life this way: *"And this is eternal life, that* ***they know you*** *the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."*

When Jesus described eternal life, he didn't define it by time, location, or even its great blessings and benefits. Instead, he described it as an intimate, personal relationship with God the Father, mediated by Jesus Christ, and maintained and deepened by the Holy Spirit.

So here is the question – if the only benefit and blessing of eternal life were a deep, personal friendship with God, would you be willing to pay the price in this life to become the kind of Christian that Paul and the New Testament writers encourage us to be as followers of Christ?

Put differently, if you were offered all the blessings and benefits of justification in this life and heaven in the next – without God – would you still want it? I believe everyone would quickly give the right answer – *"Well, if you put it that way, of course not! I would always choose God!"*

So, here's the tough question – are you choosing God now when these blessings seem distant or absent from your life? Are you delighting in God above all earthly treasures and enjoying Him more than any worldly pleasure? That is a tough question because if we are brutally honest with ourselves, we see evidence daily of how we have valued something more than God or enjoyed earthly pleasures that Jesus came to save us from.

So how do we become people whose chief treasure and pleasure on earth is God? Paul's answer is our text this morning – *"More than that, we also rejoice (exult) in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation!"*

We must do more than read this text properly or affirm its truth accurately. We must experience its reality deeply and personally so that delight in God becomes the unshakeable, uninterrupted default emotion of our lives.

And this will require the answers to four questions from this text.

I. What does it mean to rejoice in God?

More than that, ***we also rejoice in God***

- It contrasts with something we've seen earlier in Romans – the self-righteous Jew who "boasted in God" in wicked ways (2:17-24).

> ***Romans 2:17–24*** *But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law* ***and boast in God*** [18] *and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law;* [19] *and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,* [20] *an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—* [21] *you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal?* [22] *You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?* [23] ***You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law.*** [24] *For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."*

  - ◊ They relied on their position as God's covenant people
  - ◊ They relied on their possession of God's glorious Word
  - ◊ They relied on their practice of external piety

- They took pride in and boasted about these things, but they lacked true, personal joy in God Himself. The evidence of this is seen in their ongoing and deliberate disobedience to His Word (2:21-23), and in their reaction to God when He appeared in the person of Jesus of Nazareth and called them to repent.
- Their everyday actions and reactions showed they didn't truly love God with all their heart, soul, and strength (the heart of the Shema). Instead, they loved the gifts more than the Giver, making them like the pagan idolaters they had condemned in chapter 1.
- The encounter Jesus had with a rich young ruler (possibly Paul) serves as a powerful example of what this looks like. This encounter is recorded in all three of the Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 19:16-22; Mark 10:17-22; Luke 18:18-23). ***When this young religious leader met Jesus, he faced a choice: give up all he valued on earth to follow Jesus or keep his earthly treasures without Him.***

- And that is true for many of us this morning. Rejoicing in God is not merely saying the right things about him. It is not primarily expressed in thanksgiving for the good gifts we have received from Him. The rich young ruler was obviously thankful for the good gifts he had received from God in the covenant of Abraham signified by his circumcision and in the Torah of Moses which he had been scrupulously obeying from his youth on. He was thankful and obedient. **But he rejoiced in something more than God – his possessions and the comfort and honor they afforded.**

- And that is the position of many believers this morning, including some of you. You are so thankful for the good gifts you enjoy from God this morning – you moral uprightness, your understanding of truth, your marriage, your family, your health, your job, your financial security that allows you to participate in the work of God – but what would happen if God took all of that away from you in the course of a week? ***Would you still love and treasure God?*** Or would you start distancing yourself from a God who would allow these kinds of devastations to disrupt your world?
- When you accepted His gift of salvation (Rom 3:24), what were you hoping to find? And how will you respond when you realize that the gift He gave you isn't mainly tangible, physical blessings meant to improve your life here? What will your heart do when you unwrap the gift and see that it is God (not gifts from Him) Himself? Will God be enough to fill you with great, exuberant joy?
- All of us have opened a gift with great anticipation, only to find that the item inside was not quite what we expected. And when that happens, it's hard to hide our disappointment. *Poker Illustration: my children giving me what had become in our family known as "the worst birthday gift ever!"* ***That gift disappointed; God never does!***
- When you open up the gift of the gospel and find God, you have hit the jackpot of all gifts – there isn't a better gift God could have given you! ***When you get God, you get it all! And you get the source of true joy and lasting treasure!***

II. How does this Joy come through Christ?

*More than that, we also rejoice in God **through our Lord Jesus Christ**, through whom we have now received reconciliation.*

- Note that in this section, all three members of the Godhead appear. We rejoice in God the Father because of the work of God the Son, which has been poured out in our hearts by God the Spirit!
- What did God the Son do to bring us to the point where we received the greatest gift the gospel can give us – a deep, personal, unbreakable relationship with God Himself? How did we go from being His enemies under His divine wrath (Rom 5:6-10) to enjoying Him forever? Paul's answer is that Jesus did something so powerful that it repaired the breach and reconciled us to God!
- When Jesus died, several amazing realities came into effect for us in different areas where we were in great trouble. Three passages in Romans help us clearly understand five of those realities.

  Romans 3:21–26 *But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— [22] the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are **justified** by his grace as a gift, through the **redemption** that is in Christ Jesus, [25] whom God put forward as a **propitiation** by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. [26] It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

  Romans 5:10 *For if while we were enemies we were **reconciled** to God by the death of His Son, much more, now that we are **reconciled**, shall we be saved by His life.*

  Romans 8:14-17 *For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. [15] For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but **you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"** [16] The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that **we are children of God, [17] and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ**, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.*

A. In the Law Court of God's righteous justice: we were ***justified*** and declared righteous.
B. In the Market Place of sin: we were ***redeemed*** and liberated from the dominion and power of sin that enslaved us.
C. In the Temple of God's Holy Presence: God acted through Christ to ***propitiate*** and remove His righteous wrath against us.

D. In the Kingdom of God: we were ***reconciled*** to the King by the atoning death of His Son.
E. In the Family and Household of God: we were ***adopted*** and given full standing, rights, and privileges as co-heirs with His Son who is bringing many "sons" to glory.

- All of these realities became possible because God sent His Son, not to condemn the world but so that the world might be saved through Him! (John 3:16-17)
- And they came online for us when we turned from our sins (repentance) to Jesus and put our faith in His work. The moment we confessed our sins and turned to Christ, not only were we declared righteous before God, but we were reconciled to Him!
- This is why Paul urges us to rejoice – ***because we have now received reconciliation. Which brings us to the third question we need to answer from this text:***

III. How is joy in God produced, confirmed, sustained, and increased in our hearts? . . . *through whom **we have now received** reconciliation*

- This text clearly explains how Jesus secured reconciliation for us through his death. But how do we receive this incredible gift so that it truly becomes ours? In other words, how is the reconciliation Jesus achieved for us applied personally, so it ignites a deep, joyful, life-changing, soul-sustaining love for God?
- Paul directs us to the Holy Spirit, the member of the Godhead who produces, confirms, sustains, and increases our joy in God!

A. The Holy Spirit produces this jubilant joy in God as a ministry of His indwelling presence. (Romans 5:5; 8:14-17)

- ***Romans 5:5*** *and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*
- ***Romans 8:16-17*** *The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, [17] and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.*

B. The Holy Spirit confirms this joy in us by illuminating our understanding of God's Word. (Ephesians 1:16-23)

Ephesians 1:16–23 *I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers,* [17] ***that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him,*** [18] ***having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know*** *what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,* [19] *and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might* [20] *that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,* [21] *far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.* [22] *And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,* [23] *which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*

C. The Holy Spirit sustains this joy by strengthening us with His Strength to know and obey God's will so that we will be filled with what fills God. (Ephesians 3:14-19)

Ephesians 3:14–19 *For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,* [15] *from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,* [16] ***that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,*** [17] *so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love,* [18] *may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,* [19] ***and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.***

D. The Holy Spirit increases this joy in us experientially by directing our hearts into God's immense love for us. (2 Thess 3:5)

2 Thess 3:5 *May the Lord* ***direct your hearts to the love of God*** *and to the steadfastness of Christ.*

- Paul prays that the Lord himself would direct their hearts into the immensity and intensity of God's love for them!
- He uses this term "direct" earlier in his first letter to them to express his prayerful desire to return to visit them – *"Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus,* ***direct our way to you****, and may the Lord make you to increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints." (1 Thess 3:11-13)*

- Paul is not asking God to create in us a deeper love for God. Instead, he is asking God to guide His people into a deeper experience of the immense, intense love He has for them!
- Satan does not try to prevent you from understanding God's holiness, justice, and righteous wrath against sin and sinners. Instead, this actually benefits him in our lives – which is why, if he can't make us deny or forget God, he directs our attention to the severity of His righteousness, justice, and wrath.
- However, Satan will do everything in his power to prevent you from understanding and experiencing the immense love and intense delight God has in you!
- When you realize the joy and delight God finds in you, it transforms everything in you and around you!
- Illustration: the immense love and delight a father has for his son or daughter, the first time he holds them in his hands!

IV. What are the Implications of this joy for daily living? (Rom 8:31-37)

A. God is for us; therefore, no one can come against us! (8:31-32)

*What then shall we say to these things? **If God is for us, who can be against us?** [32] He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*

B. Christ is interceding for us; therefore, no charge or accusation against us will stand in God's sight! (8:33-34)

Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. [34] Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

C. God is fighting for us; therefore, no one will defeat us and nothing can destroy us! (8:35-37)

*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? [36] As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." [37] **No, in all these things we are more than conquerors** through him who loved us.*

D. God is with us; therefore, no power exists that can separate us from His love for us or diminish His delight in us! (3:38-39)

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, [39] nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Nor is this something new that Paul talks about for the first time! Hundreds of years earlier, a humble prophet named Zephaniah said this to God's people who were discouraged and disheartened by the difficulties of life, the damage done by their own sin, and their diminished standing even after repenting: *The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing. (Zephaniah 3:17)*

Conclusion: How should we respond to this text?

1. We should glory and exult in God's love for us by reminding ourselves of it daily in the beauty of the Gospel! (Rom 5:8)

. . . but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

2. We should glorify the God who loves us by enjoying Him now and forever! (Psalm 37:4; Phil 4:4)

- ***Psalm 37:4 Delight yourself <u>in the LORD</u>**, and he will give you the desires of your heart.*
- ***Philippians 4:4 Rejoice <u>in the Lord</u>** always; again I will say, rejoice.*

3. We should keep ourselves in this amazing love! (Jude 1:21; 1 John 5:21; Ephesians 6:24)

- ***Jude 1:21** keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.*
- ***1 John 5:21** Little children, keep yourselves from idols.*
- ***Ephesians 6:24** Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.*

Here is Paul's own testimony of the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus!

- ***Philippians 3:8** Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ*

Do you feel this way about Christ – or are you living for and enamored by the things Paul discarded in the rubbish pile?

A Final Admonition

- Paul ended his first letter to the Ephesians with an exhortation to love Jesus with an unadulterated (incorruptible) love! (Eph. 6:24).
- Thirty years later, Jesus sent them a letter through John in which He rebukes them for leaving their first (chief) love for other things (Rev. 2:1-7). And what had replaced their first love (for God) was not idols (like OT Israel) or worldly pleasures (like Demas). **They had stopped enjoying God!**
- They labored and endured hardship in their service for Christ. They guarded the truth about Christ against error and false teachers. They suffered and faced hostility and persecution for Christ. BUT as they did all of these things, somewhere along the way, they stopped loving and enjoying Him!

So what has replaced your joy in God?

- You might be doctrinally sound!
- You might be fighting for the truth against error!
- You might be serving sacrificially!
- You might be suffering for the sake of the gospel!
- And yet God may be saying to you what He said to this church – "You have left your first (chief) love! You are to love me more than any gift I give you; more than any service you do for me; or any relationship or opportunity no matter how good and pleasant."

Jesus said, *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind!"* (Matt 22:37)

So do you love and enjoy God like this? Is He the object of your heart's love? Is He the one who refreshes your soul? Does He occupy your mind? Do you delight yourself in the Lord? If not, could that be the reason for the emptiness and frustration that fill so many of our lives this morning?