The Abounding Gift of Justification
Romans 5:1-5

Without wishing to state the obvious, something can be true and it have zero relevance for your life, can't it? I'm named after an uncle - but that has had little impact on my life and none at all on yours. The Empire State Building is held together by over 10 million rivets - true but of no relevance for how you live your life.

But what about the doctrine of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone? The great truth of the Reformation, and that became and remains *the* dividing line - that tragically Roman Catholicism condemned and still condemns.

Tragic because that's exactly what Paul's been setting out in Romans so far: that you are forgiven, and declared not guilty, and counted righteous before God, not because of anything you bring to the table - but because of Jesus. Not because you do good works, or make sacrifices to idols - ancient or modern; not because you've tried to live a virtuous life - by obeying the written laws of the Old Testament or the unwritten laws of modern secular Western culture; not because you do penance, or invoke the saints, or rub a rabbit's foot, or buy some crystals, or support the right political causes - but because you have put your trust in Christ and what he's done for you.

The problem is, we might be tempted to think that is no different from names of uncles and numbers of rivets - it might be true, but *really*, it doesn't *actually* make any difference to how we live.

To which Paul would say, 'Are you serious?! Do you have any idea what you are talking about?' Actually, he wouldn't say that, because what he actually says is, 'Therefore'.

You see, at key points in Romans, Paul takes a pause and says, *let's just apply that*. All that I've been telling you is true - and all that Christ has done for you is real - *therefore* - let's see how that can make a radical difference in your life.

And he does it at the start of Romans 8: '*Therefore*, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.' (Rom 8:1) - because if Christ was condemned for you, you'll never be condemned, Paul says. So you don't need to live under the dark cloud of condemnation any longer.

And he does it again in Romans 12, '*Therefore*, I appeal to you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice' (Rom 12:1). Because if Christ sacrificed himself for you, to win you God's favour, sacrifice your life for him… *not* to earn God's favour but because you already have it.'

And yet, the first place he does it, is here, in today's passage. Verse 1, '*Therefore*, since we have been justified *by faith*…' and what follows is extraordinary. Because it's about how you can find joy in life and hope in suffering. How you can live well when life is going well, and when it isn't.

So we're going to look at three things: the abundant fruit, the positive cascade, and the overflowing gift that come from justification by faith.

The Abundant Fruit of justification
Imagine an apple tree laden with fruit. Each apple full and red and delicious to the taste. And read the New Testament and you realise, the doctrine of justification by faith alone is like that tree - you pull back some leaves and there's freedom from guilt, hanging there, waiting to be picked, and

there's cleansing from shame, and rest from your striving; and look! there's purpose for life, and there's no fear in death. And here's love for the unlovely, and welcome for strangers. And here's humbling for pride and there's lifting up for the downcast. And branch after branch reveals fruit after fruit. All of them growing from the tree of justification by faith alone.

But here, Paul wants you to taste just three of those. Look at the first one: v1, 'Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, *we have peace with God.*'

Notice what he doesn't say. Because he doesn't say, 'we have peace *from* God' though that is a wonderful fruit! I mean, that you can be facing something hard, and you don't know how things are going to pan out, but in all the uncertainty God gives you peace, that's remarkable.

But that's not what Paul's talking about here. It's not peace *from* God - it's peace *with* God. That when you've been justified by faith in Christ, and been forgiven and counted righteous in him, you're at peace *with* God.

And you might hear that and go, 'err… but that makes it sound like me and God were - or are - at war!'

Exactly, Paul says. Because back in chapter one he described how, v18, 'the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.'

You see, if you had to write a paper on 'what is wrong with humanity?', what would you put? Cultural imperialism? Wokeness? The patriarchy? Feminism? Or the answer ChatGPT gave me, 'There isn't one single thing "wrong with humanity," because humanity isn't one thing.' Well, thank you ChatGPT.

Except the Bible begs to differ, because it says, *the* fundamental problem with humanity is that we really don't want God to be God. *We* want to be God. Just like the serpent offered Adam and Eve: we want to define for ourselves what's right and wrong. We want to create our own identities. And we don't need a god to tell us those things. We can be god - we can be, no, we *are* at the centre of life.

But in doing that, we've parked our tanks on God's lawn, Paul says. And in response God says, 'No. I'm your Creator - you don't get to create me, and the Universe is mine, not yours, and I'm the Judge, not you. So I get to tell you what's right and wrong, and define who you are, and what the point of your life is, and how you should live it.'

And if you bristle at that even just a bit, it makes Paul's point, doesn't? Man against God.

But now, Paul says, something extraordinary has happened. Because into this theatre of hostility, Christ has come. And at the cross he took upon himself all our rebellion and with it, the wrath of God against our rebellion.

And as a result, for those who put their trust in Christ, the fighting's over, the penalty's been paid, and the hostilities have ended. Verse 1 again, 'we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.'

And like so many good things, it's what the Old Testament prophets said would happen. As Isaiah said: 'For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince *of Peace*. Of the increase of his government *and of peace* there will be no end' (Is 9:6-7).

So the crown prince of heaven himself came - why? To make peace. To give his life for rebels, to make us his friends. Because in the Bible, peace is always more than just the end of hostilities, it's an all encompassing well-being.

That's what Christ has done for you, Paul says - he's won you friendship with God - and everything that goes with it.

But there's another fruit hanging from the tree. Verse 2, 'Through him, we have also obtained *access* by faith into *this grace* in which we stand.'

So imagine you're just you. But when you were at college you became friends with someone you later discover is heir to a vast, stunningly beautiful estate. Let's call him Lord Summerly. And one day, during vacation, he invites you over to his stately home, and it is beautiful. And he welcomes you inside, and as he nips off to go get something, he shows into the most magnificent lounge you have ever seen. And as you stand there you're surrounded by priceless pieces of art, gold and silver ornaments, and exquisitely embroidered furniture, and a chandelier hanging from the ceiling the beauty of whose crystals takes your breath away. And you can't believe that *you*, nothing-special-about-you *you* are there.

But neither can the head butler, who walks in unannounced, look you up and down, and says, 'Who are *you*? What are *you* doing here?'

What would you say? Er… I try really hard to love everybody… and I pray… and sometimes I practice mindfulness… and I know I'm not as good as some, but I'm better than others'? No. What would you say? 'I'm a friend of Lord Summerly's he invited me - infact, he told me I *had* to come. And he showed me in here.'

And that is what justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, has done for you, Paul says. Through Jesus - and not through anything you have done - you have been granted access into this grace in which you stand.

Now, to be tolerated by God would be one thing, wouldn't it? And to be at peace with him would be even better. But to be granted access, and to stand in God's everlasting grace - to remain there - for ever? That's another level all together, isn't it?

Because once, you were shut out of the throne room of God. Once that door was barred and bolted. But now, Paul says, Christ has thrown open the doors open, and says, 'Come! Enter! Stay!'

You see, if you're not yet a Christian, imagine that on the day you die you find yourself standing at the gate of heaven, what will you say to get access? What pass will you show? How will you try and talk your way in? Will you show them your CV, or list all your accomplishments or good works? But what if another list was brought out - of the stuff you didn't do? Or of the less than good

reasons you did some of the things you did do? Then, like Belshazzar in the book of Daniel, it'll be like your life is weighed in the scales and found wanting. We all are.

But what if Jesus lived the perfect life you have failed to live? What if he died the death you deserve to die? What if he carried your sin, so you can wear his righteous? Then you can say, 'The Lord of the house told me to come.'

And yet, you don't have to wait for the day of your death to make use of that access, do you? Because if you're a Christian, you are not like some North Korean official, in favour one moment, and purged the next. You *stand* in grace. So when the truth of justification by faith sinks in you can live life with a deep sense of security: 'Because of Jesus, my heavenly Father loves me, nothing and no one can turn his love away.'

But it also means you have access to God's throne of grace whenever you need it - which is pretty much every day, isn't it? Which means that every day, and any moment, you can pray and know you're heard. So you don't need any go between - because Jesus *the* High Priest, is your go-between. And he doesn't just give you access, he tells you 'my Father is now your Father, and my God is now your God.' Which means, when you need help, you know where to go.

Ok, but there's one more fruit of justification Paul wants us to taste: v2 again, 'And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.' You see, through the prophet Habakkuk, God held out the prospect that one day, 'the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the seas.' (Hab 2:14) And how does water cover the sea? Err, it is the sea. Exactly. So one day, the world and everything in the world will fizz with the glory of God.

The problem is, Roman 3:23, 'all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.' (Rom 3:23). Which means, on our own, none of us qualify for that future day. But Christ hasn't left us on our own. And he did make the grade. And so as we put our trust in him, and not in ourselves, as we are justified by grace, through faith, you can and will be a part of that glorious future, Paul says. Which means you can live with joy and hope.

I mean, in English, *hope* is a pretty *damp* word, isn't it. 'I hope it's not going to rain tomorrow, but I'm English so it probably will…..' But there's nothing damp about Biblical hope. Biblical hope is sure and certain expectation. Because, understand justification by faith and you know how the story ends; you we know where you're heading - and the revealing of the glory of God.

But our secular western culture can never give you that kind of hope, can it? Because it leaves you as a random product of chance floating in a meaningless, purposeless universe, whose only future is to die by flames or freezing. I mean, is it any wonder that levels of anxiety, hopelessness, and suicide are so high? It's a world devoid of hope.

But the gospel tells you something far better. It tells you you matter so much Christ died for you. It tells you you really do have a purpose - to live now and all eternity for the glory of God. So with it it gives you hope, and with it, joy.

And yet, Paul says, there's more. It also changes the way you experience the hardest of times.

A Positive Cascade

Verses 3-5: ‘Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame.’

And the word for ‘sufferings’ is the word *thlipsis* - *tribulation.* And Jesus said, 'in this world you will have tribulation [*thlipsis*, suffering] - but take heart, I have overcome the world.’ (John 16:33). And having been stoned and left for dead for preaching Jesus, Paul tells the early Christians, ‘through many tribulations [through much *thlipsis*] we must enter the kingdom of God’ (Acts 14:22).

Now, I don’t know about you, but I can put up with a bit of suffering, so long as I can complain about it, or draw attention to it, or blame others for it. But, Paul says, understand you’re justified by faith in Jesus and you’ll *rejoice* in your suffering.

Not rejoice *because* you’re suffering. That’s what masochists do. And Christians aren’t masochists. And not rejoice *because* of suffering because now God owes you, or because it gives you a free-pass on sin or self-pity, or leverage over others.

But we rejoice *in* our suffering. In the midst of it. Because if at the cross Jesus shouldered your sin, and carried your shame, you know he’s not using this suffering to punish you. He loves you so much he was punished for you. And that means, if God is allowing you to go through something hard, he must have some loving fatherly purpose for doing so.

In fact, Paul says, ‘we rejoice in our sufferings *knowing* that suffering *produces* endurance.’ So this hard thing you’re having to face - it’s not pointless - it’s productive. And what it produces is perseverance. Because it makes us focused. We get serious about what really matters. It helps sort out our priorities. And talk to someone who has gone through it and they may never wish to go through it again, but they also wouldn’t want to unlearn the lessons they’ve learned for the world.’

And when you’ve been through such a time, and found Christ to be absolutely faithful, the next time something hits you, you can talk to your soul and say, ‘Buckle up soul; God proved himself last time, and you can trust him again.’ And that’s endurance.

And v4, ‘Endurance produces character.’ Because suffering tests you, like silver is tested in the refiner’s crucible and the dross is scraped off. And you begin to notice the temptations typical to suffering, like self-pity, or fear, or lashing out, or despair. And when they show their head, you begin to recognise the face, and knock ‘em on the head. And as you do, your character is being refined.

But then, v4 again, ‘Character produces hope.’ Err…haven’t we already had hope? ‘Sure we have’, Paul would say, ‘but this is a positive feedback loop, a virtuous circle, a cascade of grace’. Because when your character is being refined, hope and expectation grow. And you long for the day when all suffering will be over, when your King, who suffered for you - is revealed in all his glory. And you hope for that day with a steadfast, battle-hardened hope.

You see, when life is good, we don’t tend to think much about what we’re trusting in or hoping for, do we? It’s only when life is under stress that we become conscious of what we think will see us

through. But know you're loved and accepted by Christ, and counted righteous in him, it gives you the security to examine your heart and face the truth about yourself, and to being to change.

Because Christian hope, Paul says, v5, 'does not put us to shame.' It never leaves you thinking, 'boy, was I stupid to trust in Christ.'

The Overflowing Gift
Verse 5, '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.'

So everyone who is truly trusting Christ, has the Spirit of God dwelling in them. But he is not like some silent house guest, sat on the sofa of your heart, with whom you have to make awkward and one-sided conversation.

No, it's the Spirit who speaks to your heart. As Paul says later, 'The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God' (Rom 8:16). Telling you - you are loved and chosen by God. Because in Paul's words, he pours his love into your heart.

A few years back the Times newspaper ran an interview with a well known TV personality, in which she said, 'The crowning ambition of my life is to be able to be with another person. That's all we want. We say we want world peace, but in truth we want to be totally exposed in front of someone who says, 'Actually, you're alright.' The creepy intimacy of really knowing someone and them really knowing me… I would be incredibly sad if I got to the end of my days and didn't have that.'

In other words, we all want to know that someone has seen us to the bottom, loves us all the same, and tells us, 'you're alright.' That's what justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ gives you, Paul says. Not like some lover who walks out on you in three months time, but the God of the Universe, the source and fountain of love. And he doesn't give you a few drops of his love, he *pours* it into you by his Spirit.

Who needs to experience that? I mean, if you live with the scars of someone telling you the opposite of 'you're alright', that you're useless and will never amount to anything; you do. Of if life is hard, or you see your sin, and feel anything but alright, you do.

The truth is, we all do. Because we were made to experience it. And every other relationship is just pointing us towards it. And yet, our hostility to God cuts us off from it. But Christ came to pay the price of that hostility. And we are worthy of wrath - but he gives us grace. We deserve despair but he gives us hope. We should reap sorrow, but he gives us joy. Coldness should be ours, but he gives us overflowing love. And it's all, Paul says, because of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So… is justification by faith a dry and dusty doctrine, not worthy of dividing over? No. It's a tree laden with fruit, it's a waterfall cascading with blessing, it is love poured into your heart.