

ROMANS 5:1-11
PEACE, GRACE AND GLORY!

The story is told of an old man who lived in Texas some 100 years ago and more. He was a poor farmer who owned a small piece of land, had little shack built on the land and lived a poor life all of his days; he scraped and saved and survived. Then he died and left everything that he had to his family, which wasn't really very much at all. They had all moved away, so all they wanted to do was to sell the house and the little piece of land. So they did. Someone bought the land for not very much money and then began to dig and prospect and, of course, in a short time discovered oil under the ground. In the next few years millions of barrels of oil were taken out of wells on this small piece of land, once owned by our poor farmer. He was rich, but he didn't know it; he had this wealth under his very feet, if only he had known it..

I tell that story as a little parable of us as Christians. We are rich, but often we live life as if we were poor. We have spiritual blessings in abundance in Christ, but often we don't realise it and complain that God doesn't care for us and love us as much as we want. Or worse, we think that we have to earn God's love and favour and so we drive ourselves on and on to achieve more things so that God will love us more. Today, I want us to see a little of what we have; not that we will have one day, if we're good enough, or in heaven; but what we have, now, today, ours because Jesus loves us; we don't have to earn this, nor have to persuade God to give us these things; we have them, they are ours. We should enjoy them; revel in them; rejoice!

In Romans 5, there are 3 blessings that Paul says we have, summed up in 3 words: peace, grace, glory.

Peace: is a word that can mean so many different things, from a feeling inside us to the ending of war in the world. Here this is not about how we feel, but about what we have. *"therefore since..." (v1)* God is our friend; there has been a reconciliation. Paul has spent chapters 1-3 of Romans building up a case which demonstrated that the world and God were at odds with each other. We are the son in the story of the prodigal who has walked away from his father, who has gone his own way in life, made a mess and comes back home thinking that he needs to persuade his father to accept him back as a servant. All the time, his father has been watching for his son coming and when the son does appear, runs out to greet him, throws his arms about him and gives him the best coat, the ring, the shoes for his feet – all the marks of being a son again. A reconciliation has been made; the father and son are at peace with each other again. Despite all of our faults, mistakes, waywardness and a lack of faith, there has been a reconciliation and we are friends with God; God is our Friend and our Father and we have peace with Him.

Grace: How many of us go through life living with the mantra 'you only get what you deserve!?' We bring that into Church and our relationship with God and we believe God gives us what we deserve and so He gives us not very much that is good and whole lot that is bad because we've not been as good as we should! Grace throws that mantra out of the window and consigns it to the dustbin. *"through whom..." (v2a)* Grace is about being given things we don't deserve; grace is God blessing us when we don't deserve it; grace is God loving us when we have not loved Him. That's the key to understanding what grace means; this whole notion of getting what we deserve is thrown out and God blesses us richly anyway! To say that God is gracious is to say that God loves us and keeps on loving us even though we are not perfect people! We stand in God's grace.

Glory: somehow 'glory' describes the greatness of God; glory is a God-word! Yet somehow here this is about us. *"we rejoice..." (v2b)* We are sharers in God's own

eternal life. The disciples were given a glimpse of this glory when Jesus was changed on the top of the mountain and became dazzling white and heard God's voice: "*then...*" (*Mark 9:7*) This shows us something of the otherness of Jesus and the glory of God and the hope that we have is that we will share in that glory and that eternal life; this is a sure and certain hope, something we have but not yet; it is a hope that is only to be realised but everything else is secure! This is *the* ultimate blessing; there is nothing bigger, nothing better, nothing grander than this and it is ours! This is our sure and certain hope! We share in the glory of God.

These are just three of the blessings that 'we have'. Let me say again, these are not gifts that we still have to earn or persuade God to give us; these are gifts and blessings that we have; they are ours! Paul goes to show us that all of this is down to way in which God has loved us: "*God demonstrates...*" (*v8*) We have not earned God's love; we have not deserved God's love; God loved us when we were unlovable and unlovely and had not loved Him and Jesus died for us and so God blesses us with riches beyond our wildest dreams.

Here is the deep connection with the Lord's Supper, spread out on the table. The written word, the preached word tells us what God has done for us and given to us; the Sacrament shows us in picture form, in the bread and wine what God has done for us. Robert Bruce was minister of St Giles in the 16th century and preached a classic set of sermons on the Lord's Supper and amongst many gems he said this: "There are two givers in this Sacrament: the minister gives the earthly thing (the bread and wine), Christ Jesus, the Mediator, gives the heavenly thing." The heavenly thing is Christ Himself and all His blessings, peace, grace and glory to name but three! So as we share bread and wine together round this table, the Spirit takes the word that we have heard and tells us, persuades us, shows us by the visible things and things that we touch, of the way in which God has blessed us in Christ.

We are people rich beyond measure. The first thing to do: realise that; take seriously what we've been thinking about today. The second thing: believe it, take it to heart; don't say 'this is for someone else; this is only for serious Christians' (whatever that means); this is you we are talking about and you have to believe that! We are people rich beyond measure; God has loved us in the best way that He can; we have peace, grace and glory; these are ours; rejoice in these gifts, enjoy them, revel in these wondrous gifts. What more can I say? The rest is for you to see!