

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Things which accompany salvation: Peace and Deliverance

It's a great thing to be a Christian!

In many ways, for most people, the point at which you became a Christian was a reasonably unspectacular moment. Certainly it was of great importance for you and it will forever be the most important moment of your life, but in terms of the practical circumstances, there may have been not much special that occurred. It's not as if you suddenly looked different, or the world stopped to notice that momentous occasion. Some people certainly have very dramatic conversion stories like the apostle Paul and his Damascus road experience (see Acts 9:1-9), but this doesn't seem to be the case for most people.

But when you became a Christian, what happened was anything but simple and insignificant. So many things happened:

- You were forgiven;
- You were justified;
- You were redeemed;
- You were made new;
- You were cleansed; and
- God's Holy Spirit came to dwell in you.

Although it may have seemed a simple thing to come in faith to Jesus Christ for salvation, God was doing a lot in your life at that point.

In this series on Truth for Today we are trying to explore some of the things that God did when He saved you, and some of the things that are yours to enjoy as gifts from God as a result of your faith in Jesus Christ. Today, we are going to think about two great truths from the Bible about our salvation. First we'll remind ourselves that saved people have peace with God. Then we will think about how God delivers us from judgment and from daily temptations.

Recently I was listening to a missionary telling about a man he spoke to in one of the towns he visited in another country. The man asked this missionary to make him a promise. He explained how he prayed to God every day and asked the missionary if, when he died, the missionary would promise to pray for him every day. When the missionary asked this man why he would need to do that, it turned out that the man was full of doubt and anxiety. He thought that if this missionary would just pray for him every day, then surely God would let him into heaven and would forgive his sin. How sad! And yet I wonder if actually many people think similar things to this man and have no assurance about their salvation. They would be unable to say to you, "Yes, I'm a Christian. Christ died for me and when I die I will go to be with Him forever. My sins are forgiven and I'm glad to be a Christian." Even though they have heard the truths of the Gospel and say they have asked God to forgive them, they have no peace. They just don't know whether God has really forgiven them or not. Will they be punished for their sins or won't they? That's why the man the missionary met wanted someone to pray for him when he died.

The missionary was able to give this man wonderful news. He didn't need anyone to pray for him when he died. Listen to the words of Romans 5: "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have **peace** with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

What could be clearer than that? If you have been justified by faith, you have peace with God. There is no doubt about it! If God has declared you to be in a right condition before Him (that's what it means to be justified), then you have peace with God. There is no need to worry about whether God will one day forgive you and allow you into heaven. He certainly will. Why? The previous verse gives us the answer. It's because "Jesus our Lord ... was delivered up because of our offenses and was raised because of our justification" (Romans 4:24-25). What wonderful news! Man can be justified by God. That means we can be declared to be in a right standing with God. That's remarkable isn't it!

It's even more remarkable when you consider that when Paul wrote these verses in Romans 4 and Romans 5, he had just spent the first three chapters demonstrating how no matter how hard they tried men could not measure up to

God's standards. Whether they tried to impress God with religious behaviour, or whether they tried to live morally and uprightly, or whether they tried to live according to their conscience, Paul concluded *"there was no difference. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:22-23).

All of mankind had a problem. In fact Paul, quotes from the Old Testament and says, *"The way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes"* (Romans 3:17-18, see Isaiah 59:7-8 and Psalm 36:1). No one was good enough, no one was righteous enough. No one had sufficient understanding. No one really sought after God seriously. So writes Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the first three chapters of Romans.

What a gloomy conclusion and picture of the state of mankind. As you listen to this message today, do you realise that this sorry picture describes all of us? This is not just a description of some people who lived in Rome a couple of thousand years ago, but a true description of all people in all time. We've all *"sinned and fallen short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23).

Isn't it good that Paul didn't finish his letter to the Romans at that point? God had more He wanted us to know. Paul goes on to tell us we can be justified freely by God's grace (Romans 3:24). The sins we have committed make us deserving of God's judgment. *"The wages of sin is death"*, Paul writes in Romans 6:23. But God freely offers us *"the gift of eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 6:24). Paul explains how Jesus died on the cross to bear our sin and God can righteously and justly forgive us and put us in right standing with God. He will accept the judgment of His beloved Son, the Lord Jesus, in our place if we come to God in faith. All of the ways man tried to impress God in the first three chapters of Romans will do us no good. God offers salvation freely as a gift. We receive it by faith!

Everything that stood between me and God has been removed by the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. I don't need to fear a future judgment for the wrongs I've committed, because God says He will accept His Son's death in my place! Let me repeat the comforting and reassuringly precious words at the beginning of Romans 5: *"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have **peace** with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Romans 5:1).

We can have peace with God! Do you know it? Have you ever confessed your sin to God and thanked Him for providing His Son as your Substitute? I'll say again, it's a great thing to be a Christian. No wonder Paul writes later in Romans: *"How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of **peace**, who bring glad tidings of good things!"* (Romans 10:15, see Isaiah 52:7).

The Gospel is a message of good things. What could be better news! We don't need to fear death. We don't need to live our lives wondering if we have done enough to satisfy God. We don't need to spend sleepless nights wondering if we will go to heaven when we die. We can be sure of it, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote other letters that form part of our New Testament, and in some of them wrote other things about the peace that a believer can enjoy. In Colossians 1:19-20 he writes: *"For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross."*

If we're ever tempted to doubt whether we have been forgiven by God, we need only to look back to the cross. The Lord Jesus made peace through the blood of His cross. There we are reminded of the sacrifice He made so that we could have peace.

The peace a believer can enjoy with God should affect our lives. Paul writes in Philippians 4:6-7 *"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."*

Having peace with God is a truth that will guard our hearts and mind. Colossians 3:15 says, *"Let the **peace** of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful."*

This is similar to the instruction given to the Philippians but gives us the added note here that the peace we have with God is supposed to make us more thankful and affect how we act with other believers who are part of the "one body" (Colossians 3:15) into which we have been called. Does our experience of the peace of God affect our lives in a similar way?

Of course, all of the truths we've been considering are only true for believers. If you don't have faith in Christ, you can't enjoy peace with God. How can you have peace with God when you're rejecting the only way He has provided for you to be forgiven and brought into right standing with God? If you are not right with God, then you're still in the situation described in the first three chapters of Romans. The way of peace you have not known. But it doesn't need to stay that way. Accept God's gift of eternal life today! This peace is available to all. If I may borrow the words of Paul in

Romans 15:13, I pray that *“the God of hope fill you with all joy and **peace** in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”*

Peace with God is a wonderful truth of Scripture. But I want to take you back to the man talking to the missionary I spoke about at the beginning of today’s message. Do you remember that he was anxious and didn’t enjoy peace with God? That was why he wanted the missionary to pray for him when he died. I said that I thought many people felt like that. I wonder if one of the reasons why we so often feel doubts about salvation, is because we feel the very real effects of sin in our lives. Even though perhaps we have been Christians for many years and know all about the teachings of the Gospel in theory, we find ourselves sinning more frequently than we would like and we also find ourselves not doing many of the things we know we should do. We have the best of intentions, but time and again we give way to doing things we know we shouldn’t. It’s perhaps no wonder that in some cases we start to doubt our salvation. Can we really be Christians since we keep letting the Lord down so frequently and can’t seem to do anything about it?

Let me read you the experience of one man recorded in the Bible: *“For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practise; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”* (Romans 7:15-24).

I’m sure many Christians can sympathise with these words. “What I will to do I do not practise” “What I hate, that I do” These sound too familiar an experience. We cry out with this man, *“O wretched man that I am, Who will deliver me from this body of death?”* (Romans 7: 24).

Does it surprise you that it’s Paul himself who wrote this? Paul, that great servant of the Lord who was influential in leading many people to Christ, and in establishing churches in so many different places. Yet this same Paul feels so aware of the effects of sin in his life that he has to cry out, *“O wretched man that I am, who will deliver me”* (Romans 7:24).

Although Paul feels the desperation of this situation, he also knows the solution. Let’s read the next verse: *“I thank God - through Jesus Christ our Lord!”* (Romans 7:25).

Paul feels the weight of his own sinfulness, but he also knows that the same Jesus who provided him with peace with God can deliver him in his daily battle with sin. No wonder he gives thanks to God!

Paul teaches us that although it often feels like we are trapped in an endless cycle of falling into sin, and there is no hope of deliverance, this is in fact not the case. Just as we can look to the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross for peace about our ultimate destination and standing before God, so we can look to Jesus, for help in our daily fight against sin.

The New Testament speaks about a number of ways in which the Lord Jesus delivers us. When Paul writes to the Christians in Thessalonica in 1 Thessalonians 1, he says: *“Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything. For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come”* (1 Thessalonians 1:8-10).

Paul praises these believers for how they turned from idols to follow the living and true God, and how they were waiting in eager anticipation for the Lord to return. Jesus had delivered them from the wrath to come and they couldn’t wait to be with Him. This reference to deliverance is specifically referring to a future judgment. The fact that these believers had been delivered from coming wrath, was the source of their peace with God, as we’ve been considering in the first half of this talk.

A second way in which the New Testament speaks about the Lord delivering us is in connection with nonbelievers we come across in our daily lives. If people we know strongly persecute us for being a Christian, or if society decides that holding to Christian values is no longer welcome, we are to be encouraged that we do not stand alone and with no help. Hear the words of 2 Timothy 4:17-18: *“But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!”*

No matter how hard the circumstances we face as a result of our being a Christian, take heart from the fact that the Lord is able to deliver you and preserve you for His heavenly kingdom.

Paul links the fact that Jesus delivers believers from coming judgment, with the fact that Jesus also is able to deliver believers from suffering in 2 Corinthians 1:9-10 *“Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us.”*

Did you notice the three tenses involved in 2 Corinthians 1:10?

- *“God ... delivered us from so great a death”*. That was in the past. When we were first saved, we no longer stood waiting for judgment;
- *“He ... does deliver us”*. He gives us in the present the help we need; and
- *“He will still deliver us”*. For the rest of our lives we can look to the Lord Jesus for all the help we need, both in suffering and in our fight against indwelling sin.

It wasn't just Paul who had something to say about deliverance. Peter did too! He reminded his readers that *“the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations”* (2 Peter 2:9). If, like Paul, you find yourself doing the things you wish not to do, we can take comfort from the fact that the Lord knows how to deliver us from our temptations. No wonder Paul says, *“I thank God!”* (Romans 7:25) He is able to deliver us through Jesus Christ.

Did you notice Paul talks about a *“body of death”* that he needed to be delivered from in Romans 7:24? Once we come to realise that in ourselves no matter how hard we try, we fail to live up to God's standards, we're driven to look away from ourselves and to the Lord Jesus and everything He has done. The more we grasp the beauty and perfection of who Christ is and what He has done, the more we start to look away from ourselves and the less we fall into sin. The more we appreciate Christ, the less we will want to sin, because our hearts will be more taken up with how wonderful our Saviour is.

Clearly we face a lifelong struggle in our lives of faith in the Lord Jesus. The temptations of the world are many and they will never go away until the Lord returns. The people of the world will always think Christians are strange and in some cases will cause difficulties for believers. Satan will never give up trying to ruin our enjoyment of our salvation by tempting us to sin. But we do not need to lose hope and give up. Take comfort in the words of Paul as he closes his letter to the Romans: *“And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen”* (Romans 16:20).

The number of days in which we will need delivering from the pull of sin, both internally and externally, are limited. *“The God of peace will crush Satan under your feet **shortly**”* (Romans 16:20). Those days won't last forever. God has won! And in the meantime, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ will be with you. We can enjoy peace with God because of Christ's work on the cross. Enjoy again the clear statement of Scripture. Memorise it so it comes to mind whenever you are tempted to doubt: *“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have **peace** with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Romans 5:1).

And in our daily fight against sin, we look again to Jesus. Just after Paul had cried out for deliverance we get the following remarkable opening to Romans 8: *“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh”* (Romans 8:1-3).

He goes on to say, *“But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you”* (Romans 8:11).

That's the reason we can have hope. We won't overcome sin by simply trying harder. It is Christ who will give life to our mortal bodies and help us to live in a way that pleases Him.

May this increasingly be our experience as we wait for the coming of the Lord from heaven, *“even Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come”* (1 Thessalonians 1:10).

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