

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Second Sunday in Lent
February 25, 2024
Sermon by Pastor Gary A. Pufahl
Jesus, priceless treasure, brings us lasting pleasure.

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through 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.

³ Not only this, but we also rejoice confidently in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces patient endurance, ⁴ and patient endurance produces tested character, and tested character produces hope. ⁵ And 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.

⁶ For at the appointed time, while we were still helpless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ It 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. ⁸ But God shows his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

⁹ Therefore, 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. ¹⁰ For 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. ¹¹ And 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.

—Romans 5:1-11

In Mark 8:36,37, Jesus asks, **“What good is it for a man to gain the whole world and yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?”**

Those are really good questions. How often in my life are simple pleasures placed before me, not the whole world, not all the wealth and treasures and pleasures of this world, no, just a few things, and I am tempted to exchange my eternal soul for those things?

Do you ever have those temptations? A teenager goes off to college. He wants to fit in with the cool kids. So, instead of making it known that he is a follower of Jesus, he just keeps that a secret. He wants the pleasures of fitting in, so he doesn't talk about his Savior.

Do you ever have similar temptations of giving into the pleasures and treasures of this world more than Jesus? Jesus tells us some very striking words about those temptations. He says, **“Whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels”** (Mark 8:38).

Is that what you want? Do you want the treasures of this world? Do you want its pleasures? For what? To be ashamed of Jesus? Little treasures and pleasures now so that one day Jesus will say, “I don't know you; away from me?”

Oh, man, it's not worth it. There is nothing in this world that is worth losing eternity with my Savior. It's no wonder why Johann Franck wrote in his hymn: **Jesus, priceless treasure, fount of purest pleasure, truest friend to me. Ah, how long in anguish shall my spirit languish, Yearning, Lord, for thee? Thou art mine, O Lamb divine! I will suffer naught to hide thee; Naught I ask beside thee. Hence, with earthly treasure, thou art all my pleasure, Jesus, all my choice. Hence, thou empty glory, naught to me thy story Told with tempting voice; Pain, or loss, or shame, or cross, Shall not from my Savior move me, Since he deigns to love me.**

Oh, just ponder that love! The apostle Paul talks about Christ's love for us in Romans 5:6-8. He writes, **“For at the appointed time, while we were still helpless, Christ died for the ungodly. It 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. But God shows his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”**

You know that when a human being dies for another human being, it makes the news, doesn't it? Most of the time. A man runs into a burning building to save a little old lady's life, but he ends up losing his own life in the process. That makes the news. A mother puts her life between danger and her child. She ends up losing her life. That makes the news. Movie writers love these kinds of stories, don't they? Great movies are created from things like this.

But what about dying for your enemy? Would you do it? Jesus did. **“Christ died for the ungodly.”** Do you know what “ungodly” means when God says that? When he says “ungodly,” he's talking about people who could care less. A godly person in the Bible is someone who cares about God. An ungodly person is someone who doesn't care at all about God.

Paul says that's how we *were*. We've all had those moments where we are ready to throw Jesus out because of what we wanted. I've been there. You've been there. We've been ungodly. We've wanted to do our own will rather than God's will.

And that makes him angry. You see, it's a known fact with God that we make him angry when we sin. When you are self-absorbed, cruel to other people, slanderous of people, ready to throw off God to pursue some temporary pleasure, God is angry with you. And he should be. He would have every right to cast us aside and say, "Away from me."

But that's not what he does. You see, God in his divine justice had to punish our sins, but in his divine love he punishes Jesus instead of us. Jesus' cross is absolutely necessary for our salvation.

Jesus died for the sins of the world because God hates that sin. And he satisfied all the justice so that we wouldn't have to experience his wrath. Listen to what Paul says about this benefit of Christ's cross. **"Therefore, 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. For 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"** (Romans 5:9,10).

The benefit that Paul says we get, the benefit is that we get saved and rescued. From what? From being damned! That's what. We were born damnable creatures, all ready to sin with an original sinful nature.

And God doesn't want anyone to be damned, and so he condemned his own Son so we would be saved and rescued. It's amazing! Always remember from what God spared you. You and I almost died, eternally, but God has saved and rescued us from that.

I remember a day in high school that still is so very vivid in my memory. It was the day I almost died. I can still vividly replay the events in my mind as if it happened yesterday. It was a day when I stared death in the eyes and was rescued and spared. I was in a horrible car accident and walked away from it. I won't get into all the details, but I was a passenger where the car flipped over three times and stopped rolling between two big oak trees. Someone who witnessed the accident said that it looked like a big cardboard box flying in the air. I distinctly remember the events before, during, and after having my life spared. You would remember that vividly, too, if you have ever had a day like that. Why? Because on those days you get the most amazing benefit on earth. You get to live. I got to live. I walked away from death.

When you almost die, you have a whole new appreciation for life. Right? I want to take that feeling, that thought, and I hope you can see that that is the thought God wants you to have about Jesus and what he did for you.

Wow! I almost went to hell! If he had not come, I would be lost forever because I am that bad. But God punished Jesus instead. What a benefit! Jesus rose from the dead on Easter, and I am saved by his life. And if he did that while I was his *enemy*, if he gave his life while I was an *ungodly sinner*, what can I be sure of? I'm going to live in heaven. I'm not going to be damned. And neither are you. Because he died there. Jesus' cross is absolutely necessary for my salvation.

That's why Paul writes in Romans 5:11, **"And 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."** You can circle the words "rejoicing confidently" in your Bibles, okay? The word actually means "to boast about." We can't help but say nice things about God. We boast about him. When can a person do that? When can a person boast about God? Rejoice in God?

I suppose you can do that anywhere and in anything, right? But the joy Paul is talking about here, the boasting that he is talking about here is the joy we have in our salvation. We are truly rescued. We are truly saved. That's the boasting that takes place in our lives. Jesus saved me. Me? He saved me! I am reconciled. I am God's friend. I had no right to be with him. But he changed everything. He made me his own. That's the kind of boasting we do in our lives.

And so, not only do I boast and rejoice in Christ's cross which has saved me, I also rejoice in sorrows and heartaches I face which keep me focused on Christ. Do you know how that is? Paul says it like this in Romans 5:1-5: **"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through 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. Not only this, but we also rejoice confidently in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces patient endurance, and patient endurance produces tested character, and tested character produces hope. And 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."**

That's the hope that Johann Franck had. He lived during the Thirty Years' War. He saw devastation all around him. More than 8 million people lost their lives in Europe between 1618 and 1648, thirty years, due to war, pestilence and disease. It was a horrible life during those years.

But shortly after the Thirty Years' War, Johann Franck wrote the hymn "Jesus, priceless treasure." Just think about that. He had seen so much pain and agony, but he can write, "**In thine arms I rest me; foes who would oppress me cannot reach me here. Though the earth be shaking, every heart be quaking, Jesus calms my fear. Lightnings flash and thunders crash; yet, though sin and hell assail me, Jesus will not fail me. Hence, all fear and sadness! For the Lord of gladness, Jesus, enters in. Those who love the Father, though the storms may gather, still have peace within. Yea, whate'er I here must bear, thou art still my purest pleasure, Jesus, priceless treasure!**"

So, you can boast. **Jesus, priceless treasure, brings us lasting pleasure!** Amen.