

March 4, 2018

*Romans 5:1-8:*

***“The Journey That Must Be Made:  
God Said So”***

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Whether you have kids or not, you probably have an opinion about parenting. Generally speaking, there are two styles of parenting. There is the “Because I said So!” approach, and there is the “Let Kids Be Kids!” method. The “Because I said So” approach, affirms the authority of the parents. The parents are the grown-ups, know the rules and expectations, and have life experiences. This approach assumes that a child is naturally willful and must be trained and sometimes forced to do what is right. The “Let Kids Be Kids” method is quite the opposite. Here, parents and kids are equals, rules and expectations are always negotiable and generally not enforced for the sake of so-called “freedom.” And, what is considered to be right, is really dependent upon perspective. It is assumed that the child is naturally good and will figure it all out, so let them be.

I realize that all of this is an oversimplification. I also realize that parents can mix the two approaches. Still, the distinctions got me thinking. It occurred to me that if I would have said to any of my children, “here, eat this candy because I said so!” there would have been no complaints. I would have been a “hero.” However, when I said to my children, “here, eat these vegetables because I said so!” you would have thought that a war broke out. In their minds, I became a mean dad. It doesn’t matter that vegetables were good for their health. To children, it only matters what they want or don’t want. If a child really loves vegetables, “Because I said so!” becomes a great idea. So, what is clearly the best or not the best may be perfectly obvious to the parents, but what the children do with it will eventually be up to them, and to their well-being or detriment.

In our text for this morning, we have a “Because I said So!” moment from God. It has a most positive meaning and outcome for us, but that doesn’t mean that we necessarily look at it that way, or embrace and appreciate it for what it is. In fact, we can see it as many kids might look at eating their vegetables when they hate them.

Our epistle lesson talks about justification. To be *justified* means “to be declared righteous for the sake of the righteousness of Jesus Christ.” It is “a because **God Said So** statement.” Paul writes that “we have been justified by faith.” Because of God’s undeserved love, we have been given faith. And, because we believe that Jesus lived a perfect life on our behalf and paid for all of our unrighteousness on the cross, we have been pronounced “not guilty.” In the sight of God the Father, for the sake of his one and only Son Jesus Christ who is righteous in every way, we are counted as righteous and even welcomed into the holy dwelling of God. When the Father looks at us, he no longer sees our unrighteousness, but sees everything that his Son has done for us.

Paul says: “since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. 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.” Because **God Said So**, we are justified by faith in Christ. Because **God Said So**, we have peace in the forgiveness of sins. Because **God Said So**, we have access to God and look forward with great anticipation to the moment when we will be with him forever in glory. How can all of this be? Because “Christ died for the ungodly,” Paul writes. And that is exactly what we are apart

from God and his righteousness. We are ungodly. We are unrighteous. From our moment of conception, we have been curved in toward ourselves at the expense of God and our neighbor. As we confess: "Most merciful God, we confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. We have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone." But, all of this has changed since we have been declared to be something that we are not for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now, how do we respond to this "Because **God Said So**" thing? No doubt it is attractive to consider that we can overcome unrighteousness, death, and hell through him who is righteous, life, and salvation. And even vegetables are good for the one who doesn't like the taste of vegetables! And here may very well be the problem - the taste! The truth is that while this justification stuff is really good for you, there happens to be a certain flavor that goes with the whole thing that could very well strike a war of rebellion in any one of us to the point of spitting it out. There is this part that Paul writes: "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, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

One of the most difficult things about suffering is the way that it threatens our sense of what is true and real. Suffering provokes huge questions. I mean, justification is a wonderful gift. But, how does one swallow justification along with the taste of troubles down here that naturally come from having been justified? How do I know if God likes me when there seems to be so much evidence to the contrary in what I am experiencing as a result of Christ and his cross? You might say, "What good is justification if I still have to suffer in life?" That is really an excellent question, and a difficult one to answer.

Make no mistake about it! This is **The Journey That Must Be Made: God Said So**. It really is kind of shocking when Paul tells us that "we rejoice in our sufferings." That's a hard taste to have in our mouths isn't it? Still, we are to understand it and even appreciate it for all it's worth. Having a joyful and confident expectation, which rests in the promises of God, suffering is allowed to enter into our lives so that we might see how great our justification is. When suffering breaks into the life of the Christian and touches justification, our justification through faith transforms the suffering into a useful thing that drives us all the more to the source of our justification; namely, Jesus Christ. This further cause us to become more like Jesus who endured the cross and grave for the joy that was set before him. His resolve only grew.

As he endured all things, he pressed on to fulfill all righteousness. We see that his mental and moral qualities (his obedience) never waned in the face of the terrors of the cross and in the face of hell. Instead, he brought everything to completion. Even in the midst of the moment when he cried out as he quoted Psalm 22:1, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" he never lost hope, for in Psalm 22:3-5 Jesus goes on to say of the one who has afflicted him (for us): "Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. To you they cried and were rescued; in you they trusted and were not put to shame." Jesus is the man of sorrows and the man of hope. Paul writes of us, "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, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

This is quite a chain that Paul gives us. Suffering produces endurance. It would be better to translate this word as “single-mindedness.” Suffering gives us focus on Christ, where our focus always needs to be. And character means that we have been tested in battle. A good way to understand this word is to give an example. After you have had one child, the second child is easier. Why? Because you have been through it. If we have suffered and have processed it through the gospel of justification, it has led us to become all the more focused on Christ, and has produced an even greater confidence that has prepared us to face even our own departure. We anticipate what is unseen, and yet it is truly seen through the eyes of a most certain faith. What that means is this: if you face suffering that meets the gospel of forgiveness in Christ, your joy in the grace of God will deepen - it will cause you to rejoice. It will tear you away from down here and turn your gaze heavenward.

Again, this is **The Journey That Must Be Made: God Said So**. The question is, what are we going to do with that? Are we rebellious children who throw a temper tantrum and say “no!”? Or, do we trust our Father in heaven who has everything in hand? Unfortunately, too many people have been taught that worship is the place where you escape from the reality of everything bad. Too many people have been taught the lie that if you just become a Christian, then everything down here will fall into place. What we fail to remember is that the language of worship (God’s service to us) is first of all the sufferings and death of Christ before the glory of eternity. As Paul says in Romans 8:18, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

When a child trusts in a parent’s “Because I Said So!” that child will be less likely to stumble and fall in life. In a similar way, when a person trusts in what God has said, that child of God can deal with bearing the cross and the curve-balls of life, because God has given hope for the future. The hope of God, a forever righteousness in heaven with him who loves us, changes our perspective as we endure sorrow, suffering, and pain in this fallen world. Hope is therefore firmly grounded in faith, and hope is very close to faith so that they are almost exactly the same. However, they are different. While faith is a certainty grounded in the historical fact of Jesus, hope is a growing anticipation of the future that is ours through the life and times of Christ. How can we be sure of what we hope for and even rejoice in sufferings? Because of everything that God says! Yes! Because **God Said So!**

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott