

What Difference Does Meeting Jesus Make?

I recently got done reading a pretty interesting book called *What If Jesus Had Never Been Born*. It is by Dr. James Kennedy, who is a Presbyterian minister down in Florida. In the book, Dr. Kennedy surveys the impact of Jesus' life on the course of world history. He doesn't so much consider the effect of Jesus' life, personally, on an individual who meets Jesus. I am going to talk about that today.

But he just talks about the effect of Jesus' life on the creation of hospitals. Hospitals were born in the middle ages, set up by churches. The establishment of universities, which were also set up by churches. Literacy campaigns, the abolition of slavery world-wide, modern science, the effect of Jesus' life on the position of women and their political liberation. The effect of Jesus' life on the treatment of children, child labor law. He does a wonderful job of just going through history and seeing what impact—the fact that Jesus lived—on a purely human scale, apart from eternal salvation and dealing with the last day judgment, but just on a human scale, the effect of Jesus' life on the history of this planet.

Most of you are probably familiar with that little piece written in the 19th century by some anonymous writer called “One Solitary Life” that is often read at Christmas time.

“He was born in an obscure village. The child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another village where he worked in a carpenter's shop until he was 30. For three years he was an itinerant preacher. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family or owned a home. He didn't go to college. He never visited a big city. He never traveled 200 miles from the place where he was born. He did none of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials, but himself. He was only 33 when the tide of public opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. One of them denied him. He was turned over to his enemies and went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. While he was dying, his executioners gambled for his garments, the only property he had on earth. When he was dead, he was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend. Nineteen centuries [of course, now it would be twenty centuries] have come and gone and today he remains the central figure of the human race. All the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned put together have not affected the life of people on this planet as much as that one solitary life.”

You know, the impact of the life of Jesus Christ is incalculable. But today, what I would like to do is make this really personal and say, “What is the impact of meeting this Jesus for an individual?” For me and you?

You know, we are doing a Summer Harvest this week, a festival, a crusade, an outreach program designed to introduce our friends and our family to this incredible person, Jesus. What happens when people meet Jesus? What is

the impact of meeting Jesus on one person? One child? One grandparent? One man or teenager or woman?

So often, I think, that we reduce Christianity down to something that doesn't make any difference. I remember some years ago, my wife, Marlene, was teaching a Sunday School class with kids that had been raised in church here. She was talking about the death of Jesus and one of the kids who was a church kid piped up and said, "Yeah, yeah. Jesus died on a cross—so what?" in a real cynical tone. Marlene just came back home heart-broken because she said, "You know, already for this child he has been inoculated with some dead virus—religion, hearing the message a lot of different times, but he has never caught the real thing. He has just gotten inoculated with Sunday School teachers, church and on and on, and to him it doesn't make any difference what Jesus did." That kid never experienced the impact of the life of Jesus.

Well, I have been teaching through the book of Romans in a series that I have called "The Celebration of the Gospel" and I have tried to lay out for you a good foundation for why we are going around as a church trying to assist people to meet Jesus. And I really feel like as we come to chapter 5 of the book of Romans, Paul pulls his arguments together. It is, in many ways, a concluding chapter for his argument through the first four chapters. He ties it all together in chapter 5 by answering the question: What difference does meeting Jesus make?.

What I am doing today is to talk step by step through the first few verses of chapter 5.

"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."

"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

"Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."

What difference does it make, then, being a Christian so that we don't end up with "Yeah, yeah. Jesus died on a cross" or becoming a Christian was something that I did. I raised my hand five years ago, but basically my life is exactly the same as it was before I made the decision to become one of Christ's followers. What difference does it make becoming a Christian and meeting Jesus?

Well, Paul lays it out in a series of affirmations, the first one of which is found in verse 1: "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ..."

The first difference we read in meeting Christ is that we have peace with God. Peace with God. And right off the bat, we need to note that the Bible does not promise that if you make a decision to trust in Christ, you will have peace with your boss, or ex-spouse, or peace, necessarily, with your wife or peace with the devil. The only promise of peace that we read about is peace with God. But that ain't bad. That is a great starting point for building peace outward toward your boss and toward your children and toward your spouse. The foundation of peace with others is peace with God.

I want you to note that, as has often been pointed out, this peace that is being discussed here is an objective state of affairs. It is not necessarily a feeling of peace. It is simply a truth, a reality, that has been established. Remember that Paul described a state of affairs between us and God before we placed our faith in Christ alone. The state of affairs between us and God was one of warfare, of hostility. Whether we felt that it was; whether you feel that way; the state of affairs between the person who has not trusted Christ alone and God is hostility.

Paul's argument in Romans 1-3 was that people are not born innocent, just full of God and full of love toward the world. Paul's argument in Romans 1-3 is people come into the world in rebellion and that the course of people's lives naturally, proceeding out of their own hearts without God's intervention, is to become more and more ungodly. That is more and more independent of God. That the natural course of affairs in a person's life is to break free of the control of God and to try to do things on one's own rather than to submit to God's rule and to attempt to follow God's ways.

But because of the intervention of Jesus, Paul says that we have peace with God. The hostility between us and God is ended. We are no longer enemies of God. We are considered now, like Abraham in the Old Testament, friends with God.

The theological term for peace with God is "reconciliation." We were estranged. We were enemies. We were hostile, but now we have been reconciled.

Justification is taken from the world of the courts. It is a legal judgment. Justification is to be pronounced "not guilty" and "right" in God's sight. It is a word that is a legal word. But reconciliation is a word taken from the family. It is a personal word. God not only views you as being in the right with him, but now he welcomes you into his home and embraces you as a father would embrace a child.

Peace with God.

You know, literally billions of dollars in this country are spent every year by people attempting to discover peace. I am sure that many of you have spent lots of money trying to get peace. You know how many billions of dollars are spent medicating folks for anxiety disorders and how much money people spend drugging themselves or are on alcohol, attempting to dull the sense of a lack of inner peace. How many hours are spent on psychiatrist couches attempting to find the roots for our lack of peace?

The Bible does distinguish between peace with God, an objective state of affairs in which the hostility between us and God has ended and the peace of God. The peace of God is a feeling of peace where God's presence settles on you and calms you down. The peace of God gives you a sense of inner tranquility no matter what your circumstances are. But you know, the conditions for having peace with God, a settling of hostility with God, are the same two conditions for feeling inner peace. For sensing that every thing is going to be okay. For not being all wrought up inside.

I believe, biblically speaking, that there are two conditions for getting peace. And in the midst of all the medications and all the therapy and all the self-help books and all the advice to cope with life, here are two things that the Bible says will get you peace. And I want you to hear this. The Bible doesn't say that God will make peace with us at any price. It is not as if, you know, peace is just one of those commodities that you can cheaply buy. The Bible teaches that there are conditions for peace.

The first condition the Bible lays out for peace with God and the peace of God is righteousness. Look at the wording of verse one. It says: "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Because we have been justified, we have peace.

Do you remember what it means to be justified? It means to be declared right in God's sight. It means to have all the righteousness of Jesus, all that Jesus is—all of his obedience and all of his sinlessness and his perfect death and resurrection. The whole way that God views Jesus put in your account and credited to you so that you could receive that through faith. God declared you to be legally in the right with him. It is this judgment of righteousness that you are viewed right with God and you are going to be viewed right with God on the day of judgment. You don't have to guess about what judgment is, you are viewed right with God. That is a foundation of peace with God. The objective state of the end of hostilities so that you become a friend of God.

And I want to tell you something. The daily experience of peace is also based on righteousness. Isaiah 32:17 says, "The fruit of righteousness will be peace. The effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever."

You know, so many folks want to live life their own way. Whether they have made a decision in the past to trust in Christ for salvation or they haven't made that decision, so many folks want to live their lives their own way and create their own set of rules for sex. And create their own set of rules for how they are going to relate in marriage. And create their own set of rules for their spending habits. And their appetites and their speech. It is life trying to get outside by walking through the wall instead of using the door. We keep banging our heads into the wall. And having created their own set of rules, their own realities, they find themselves lacking peace. Being really upset with the way things are and what is happening in their lives. They get upset with God and say, "I am not experiencing any thing like what the Bible promises in terms of peace."

Listen, friends, it isn't peace at any price with God. You find that inner peace by building on a foundation of righteous living which means conforming your life to the rule of God. If your life is out of whack somewhere in terms of being out of sync with what God has commanded, then basically you have tried to create your own reality. The Lord knows the way that life works well. And he

knows that if you don't work with him and walk in the Spirit, following his ways, that the gears are just going to grind.

Isaiah, in the later chapters, repeats a statement, "There is no peace, says the Lord, for the wicked." A good test of being out of the will of God in an area is that I start losing my peace.

There is a second condition, very much related to the first, of finding peace—peace with God and the peace of God. And the second condition is unconditional surrender. We just recently got done reading about the 50th anniversary of VJ Day, the victory over the Japanese that ended the second world war. If I could use an analogy here to the end of the second world war, the Japanese for months were pursuing peace talks with the United States which would bring about an end to the hostilities. The Japanese wanted peace on their own terms. They wanted a set of conditions regarding the occupation of Japan after the second world war and the ability to retain their government and defense forces and on and on.

They came to the United States with a set of terms upon which they would have peace with us even though they were losing the war. The Americans kept insisting on one basis for peace, unconditional surrender. We will impose the peace terms.

Well, you know, I believe that that really is an appropriate analogy with having peace with God. People come to God saying they want a relationship with God and they want to establish connection with God. But they come to God with a list of terms upon which they want to have peace.

I want to come to you, God, retaining some pride, some sense that I have done something for myself here.

I want to come to you, God, without having to admit that I am a sinner, that I am really in the wrong.

I want to come to you, God, with my dignity intact, not on my knees, but with head held high.

I want to come to you, God, without having to admit that a good part of my life is lived for myself selfishly. Save me, God, but at the same time, frankly, I could save myself.

Well, God will have none of that. Ending the hostility with God means unconditional surrender. You take God on his terms and you totally give up your own terms. You come to God admitting that you are in need, that you are a sinner, that your life has been lived in large measure selfishly, that you have been living independently of God. You come to God with your hands up saying, "I give up!"

Friends, I want you to know this. That is the same way you daily experience the peace of God—unconditional surrender. Here is a little test for you. You can apply this in your own situation. Whenever I lose my peace, I know that it is probably because I have not surrendered something up to God. If I am all agitated and upset and angry, if I am irritated when I go home, you know, feeling like kicking the dog, it is probably because I haven't surrendered something to God. I haven't surrendered a problem to him. I haven't surrendered a relationship to him. I haven't surrendered a sin.

There are two conditions for peace with God and the peace of God: righteousness and unconditional surrender. Well that is the first difference in meeting Jesus—peace.

Well here is the second difference meeting Jesus makes and that is found in verse 2: "...through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand."

The first difference is that we have peace with God and the second difference is living in grace. You know, Paul says that because of Jesus' death we have access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.

There are two ways to take it and there are two pictures being drawn. If you interpret this Greek word as "access" as my version has it, the New International Version has it, then the picture is probably taken from the temple. Back in the Old Testament, access to God was severely limited, strictly limited to the high priest who was able to enter into the presence of God in the temple, in this specially constructed room called "the Holy of Holies" that was separated from the world by a thick curtain. The priest was able to push the curtain aside and enter into God's presence once a year.

But, really, in the Old Testament, it was very much like there were signs posted around the intimate presence of God: Stay out! Trespassers will be shot on sight! And in the New Testament, what we have won for us through the blood of Jesus is this unrestricted access to God. The veil has been torn and we get to be in God's presence. So, the image that Paul is drawing of the difference that Jesus makes may be drawn from the temple and the fact that we have this highway to God right now. The word "access" also means "introduction." And in that sense, the word picture may be drawn from a palace where a king lives and not so much a temple. In other words, Paul may be picturing us as citizens needing something from our great king, God, and in meeting Jesus he gives us an introduction to the king. You don't simply burst in on the king, you need a formal introduction, "Presenting Rich Nathan before the King..."

Paul says that you have that introduction. But not only do you have an introduction to the king in his palace, but you literally set up shop in the palace. He says that you have this introduction into grace in which you now live.

Christian, you don't move in and out of the palace. You don't move in and out of justification so that you need to be re-justified and re-justified. You don't blip in and out of the presence of God or blip in and out of grace. The difference meeting Jesus makes is that now the atmosphere for your relationship with God, the sphere in which you live in relationship with God is grace.

Let me put it this way so that you will understand what I am driving at. Everything that God does with you now because you have trusted in his Son and his Son's death on the cross, everything that God does with you now is in terms of grace. Even when God disciplines you, he graciously disciplines you. Even when God takes you home to be with him in heaven, that is an act of grace. The whole nature of God's relationship with you takes place in this room that would be called the "grace room". God no longer relates to you in terms of condemnation. He no longer relates to you in terms of hostility. He no longer relates to you in terms of law. The place you live, the sphere of God's relationship with you is the sphere of grace.

So we have peace with God and we live in grace. And we have an incredible future. That is the third difference meeting Jesus makes. We have an incredible future: “And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.”

Paul is talking about what is coming your way in the future. What do you have to look forward to, you who have met Jesus?

You know, I believe that a major cause of depression and mid-life crisis, people spinning out when they hit 35, 40 and 45 and 50 is because folks, as they look forward to the future, realize that the party is almost over. You know, it is hard to enjoy the present when you fear the future or when you have nothing to look forward to in the future. I believe a lot of the depression and despair in the inner cities of our country is when kids look out on their futures, all they see is a wall. They feel like they have no future. There is no hope. That is the way that a lot of America is living right now. It is going all right now, but what about the future? What about the future? What happens when the bills come due? When the bubble of debt that we have incurred as a nation, this trillion and trillion of dollars of debt—what happens when the bills come due?

It is hard to enjoy the party when you know that it is almost over. You know, the wonderful thing about meeting Jesus? The wonderful thing about meeting Jesus is that the future is always better than the present. Like that wedding party where Jesus turned water into wine. There is a line in John 2 at that wedding party where somebody says, “Every body else serves the best wine first and the cheaper wine later”. But, Jesus, you have saved the best wine until last. And that is truly a description of the Christian life. The party has hardly started.

Yes, we experience peace and we live in the sphere of grace, but we have hardly begun to enjoy the party. Here is the party: We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. What is he talking about by “the glory of God?” He is talking about the sum of God’s perfections. The glory of God is the manifestation of God, the bright outshining of God in his character and his beauty. He is literally talking about the life of God as it is manifested. The problem that Paul said in Romans 3:23 that we all experience is that we all fall short of the glory of God, his radiance and his light. But what is coming in the future is that we get to share in the glory, to share in the life of God so that the life of God infuses us and radiates through us. That is what is coming.

There are three aspects to this glory that the future holds. One is that we are going to see in the future, the glory of Jesus revealed. Titus 2:13 says that we learn to say no right now to all of our urges while we wait for the blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. We are going to see Jesus shining with light when he comes back. Filled with the presence of God. We are going to see that.

And then we are going to be filled with the glory of God. The life of God is going to be pulsating through you. And every bit of darkness in you and in me is going to be driven out by God’s life and light. And not only will we see Jesus glorified, and not only will we be glorified, but, this glory of God is going to spread to all of creation. The life of God will just permeate everything in the universe.

Romans 8:21 says: “The creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to the decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.”

Our future is a future filled with glory. The life of God spread through everything. That is a difference that Jesus makes—an incredible future.

And a radically different approach to present difficulties. Verses 3 and 4: “Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

I know that it says that we rejoice in our sufferings. We who have met Jesus rejoice in our sufferings. The word that Paul uses literally is “we boast in our suffering”, difficulties in life.

You know, last week I said that a good test for being a Christian is listening to what people boast in, what they take pride in. That for the non-Christian, generally, what the non-Christian will boast about is one of their own accomplishments, something they have done or produced. The Christian will want to boast in the accomplishment of God, what God has done, how wonderful God has been. How great it is to know Jesus. You listen to people and what they boast about and that is a good test for really where they are in terms of what they are relying on to get them through life.

But this is an interesting thing. Paul says that we boast in our suffering and in chapter 6:21 he talks about us putting off and getting rid of past sinful practices that we are now ashamed of.

Let me make this simple point: In many ways, a Christian’s boast and shame is exactly the opposite of the non-Christian. If you listen to a person who doesn’t know Jesus boast—men, you are at a locker room in a gym and you hear guys boasting, they may boast about how many women they have had sex with. They will often boast about how much they drank over the weekend. They will boast about what kind of deal they struck in making money. It is a funny thing, but when I listen to men boast, they mostly boast about things that I practiced that I am now ashamed of.

And on the other hand, the things that many men are ashamed of—weakness, the fact that life may not be going very well, difficulty and trials, are the things that Christians boast about. Meeting Jesus switches your categories. Stuff that you were formally ashamed of, you may rejoice in and stuff that you used to rejoice in you are now ashamed of. Because we have a very different view of difficulties and trials.

This word “difficulty” here means literally “to be pressured, to be squeezed.” The word picture is one of grapes being put in a wine press and they are being squeezed so that the juice runs out. That is what life’s difficulties do to a person. They put you in a vice grip and they squeeze you.

Instead of the wine press and grape analogy, I think of a tube of toothpaste. You squeeze that tube and whatever is in that tube is going to come shooting out. And I believe that difficulties, negative circumstances that you encounter, are designed to put the squeeze on you to show you what is in you.

You been squeezed recently? Someone put the press on you? Where you got into a misunderstanding with another person? They misread you and your motives? You felt that pressure mount. Have you been squeezed by financial difficulties? By illness? By family conflict? By some pressure at work?

Friends, what is coming out of the tube? Because it is difficulty that reveals what is inside. It is easy to maintain our social coolness and our patience

and our love for everyone when life is going well. But when life squeezes you, what is coming out?

I often interpret difficulties, trials, to be like God's pop quizzes. I am not saying that God sends every thing our way. But God is certainly in control of the whole process and I believe that a difficult circumstance is like one of God's pop quizzes.

I used to teach at Ohio State and every once in a while in order to keep the students sharp and on their toes, I would say to them: "Okay, put away your books. I want to give you a little pop quiz. Take out a pencil and I am going to write a couple of questions on the board. I would like you to answer them very briefly."

We may feel like we are well prepared in our Christian life. We may feel like our relationship with God is healthy and strong and that, indeed, we are doing well. And so the Lord gives us a pop quiz, a little test. He says, "Okay, now, let's see how well you are doing." Sometimes you pass the quiz, no problems. Temptation comes your way, you deal with it. Boom. You have a 100 on the quiz. Great.

Sometimes the difficulty, the quiz, comes your way and you fail it miserably. God knows what we are about. He knows where we are at. But we don't know how well we are doing in an area. We need to be shown over and over again: Here is where you are at.

Has God sprung a pop quiz on you recently? Have you been confronted by someone? Has a relationship broken down? How did you do?

See, we Christians, we rejoice in difficulties because we understand them. Paul says in verse 3: We also rejoice in our sufferings because we know, we understand something about difficulty that people who haven't met Jesus don't know. They don't understand. People who haven't met Jesus think difficulty is just random. It is just accidental. There is no sense to it. We are just bumping into a lot of problems. We will have to fight our way through.

But those of us who have met Jesus understand that God is in control of this whole process. That the difficulty isn't an accident. That even if it is not directly from the hand of God, God is over everything. That even the Devil in Martin Luther's words is "God's Devil". And we know that if we hang in there, if we endure and don't give way, that our character will, indeed, be proven and will be strengthened. And out of a strengthened character will come additional hope.

In other words, we know that we are going to be refined. That God is in the process of pointing out our weaknesses on these pop quizzes in order to strengthen us in weak areas, in order to knock off our rough edges. God, in forming us like a potter would form a clay pot, sometimes has to slap the clay around a little bit. If you have ever watched a potter with clay, that process can be pretty rough from time to time. It looks like that clay is being whacked and beaten and slapped and thrown all over the wheel. But in the end it is a beautiful vessel. And some of our difficulties and pains and illnesses and relational problems can sometimes be like that potter slapping the clay around. It can be not something that we invite, certainly, not something that we may enjoy, in terms of being slapped, but we sure see that there is a process going on.

And I do enjoy this one thing in suffering. That is I do enjoy being cornered. I do enjoy the time when God leaves me no option but to cry out to

him. The truth is that sometimes I need that. I need to be pushed into the corner, pressed against the wall, where my only hope is God. Then I feel like, okay, now it is God's. I am depending on God. I have run out of schemes and plans and resources. It is not a bad thing to have to depend only on God. It really does draw you closer to the Lord.

Do you know what ultimately is produced in your heart when you go through a difficult time? What ultimately is produced in your heart is not just dependence on God or even a refined character, but what is ultimately produced is hope. At the end of the chain of real difficulty, you will have a strengthened hope. Paul says: We know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.

Here is the way it works. Friends, I think we all suspect that at bottom we are frauds. We all see that our spirituality feels like it goes 1mm down because we know that we are filled with all kinds of mixed motives as we look at ourselves and examine our own hearts. If you are at all honest with yourself and in touch with yourself, you are very in touch with your anger and your proneness to say things that you shouldn't. You are very in touch with the way that you manipulate things for personal benefit. How in various situations when you are cornered, you may lie, exaggerate or stretch. How lust may dominate your life from time to time. And I think we all feel like we are not very deeply rooted Christians.

How real are we? We want to be real. We want to be the genuine article and not some fake or fraud. And yet, am I only a fair weather Christian? Just someone who stays with God because things are going good, but I would check out if things weren't going good. And you know there is something that happens when you go through difficulties. Difficulty weeds people out. I have seen this over the 22 years that I have been a follower of Jesus. Some people encounter difficulties in the work place or in their marriages or difficulty financially or with their kids, in illness and they just say, "Forget it" to God. Forget it. You know, I signed up so that things would go well. Things are not going well and they turn their backs on God. That's it.

They were mere professors of a faith. They had all the right words and came to all the right meetings, but they were professors. But you know the possessors are people who have been knocked around and shaped by the great potter and they have hung in there. They had something in their lives, namely Jesus, that got them through the difficulty and have triumphed.

Friends, once you have gone through the fire, you can look back and say, "You know, by the grace of God, not because of me or what I am or anything about me, but by the grace of God, there is genuine faith in my life. I really can endure. I am not as shallow as I thought I was. My faith doesn't just go down 1mm. There is a rooting in my life. God has done something wonderful."

You are always going to be afraid of pain and suffering unless you go through some difficulty and endure. And then you are going to be able to say, "You know, I can do this. I may not like it. I wish that the way to be refined and to become dependent would be by taking a cruise. But I guess I don't get too refined and my character isn't really tested when I am on a cruise ship in the Caribbean. And so, I guess the course that God has laid out is a course of training and pain, but I see that I have a deeply rooted faith. I am the real thing and that gives me real hope."

The fifth difference that meeting Jesus makes is experiencing God's love through the Holy Spirit: "And hope doesn't disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."

Now, this is an experience. Verse 5, and indeed much of what is being said, is not just a doctrinal truth. I don't know if there is any verse in the New Testament that is any more experiential than verse 5: God has poured his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. And the difference meeting Jesus makes is that you get to have an experience of God's love that goes beyond just believing in the love of God. That normal Christianity means that you get to feel the embrace of God.

Now, this is so important—the feeling of the embrace of God and the experience of the Holy Spirit, that in two weeks I am going to do a whole message or even two messages on the importance of spiritual experiences for the Christian. Some of you have come from church backgrounds where you were taught to be so suspicious of spiritual experiences and you so leaned against what was considered subjective. And what I hope to do is from the Bible show you that normal Christianity has this incredible and emotional subjective and spiritual dimension to it. The love of God poured out in our hearts. It is not just something to be believed. Something that is just a truth. It is something that is felt. And so in a couple of weeks, I am going to teach on spiritual experiences in the Holy Spirit because I think it is crucial for normal, healthy Christian living.

Well, let me finish with the last difference that meeting Jesus makes from this text. In verses 6-10: "...at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him. For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his son, how much more having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."

The sixth difference meeting Jesus makes is that we are securely saved. The person who has truly met Jesus is secure for eternity. Some folks have labeled this eternal security. But that is what this text is teaching. When someone says, "You know, you can't be sure, you can't know, you can hope you will be saved, but you can't know. Lots can happen between right now and when you die" you look at these verses in Romans, but particularly, verses 9 and 10 because I am not sure that I know of any two verses in the Bible which more clearly tells us that we can know that we will be in heaven with God if we truly have met Jesus and have trusted in Christ alone for our salvation than verses 9 and 10.

Paul is saying that if you have any doubt about eternal security, can we sit down and reason together here? Let me show you the logic of it. Let me go through the steps of an argument so that you won't doubt any more. He starts in verse 9 with the contrast between now and then; between our situation in the present and our situation on the day of judgment. And he says that now, in the present moment, you are justified. If that is true of you, and let's remember again

what it means to be justified—if in spite of all that you are, in spite of the dark spots on your soul right now, in spite of your current sins right now, and your weaknesses, if in spite of all that you are right now God chooses to pronounce a verdict on your life of “not guilty” then what can get in the way of your future salvation?

In other words, if your sins didn’t prevent God from declaring you “not guilty” then what is going to get in the way in the future? What could you do if your sin didn’t keep you out?

Some people say that nothing can separate you but your sin can and you could walk away. Well, if your sin didn’t prevent you from getting a “not guilty” verdict on your life, but God has declared you “not guilty” then what will you do in the future that will kick you out and prevent God from saving you? It is a matter of logic. It is a matter of understanding the word “justification” to be declared “not guilty” even though we are sinners.

And then if we don’t get it, Paul lays it out even more plainly in verse 10: “If when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more having been reconciled shall we be saved by his life!”

Paul hammers home the reasoning in verse 10 and he is moving from the greater to the lesser. If God did the greater thing, the more extraordinary, the more difficult thing already, doesn’t it make sense, logically, that he will have no problems doing an easier thing?

He shows us the security that we have since we have met Christ using two contrasts. The first is a contrast between us formerly being enemies but now being friends. And Paul says, “If while we were enemies...” An enemy is not someone who is just a little less than a friend. An enemy is not a close acquaintance. An enemy is not even someone who is a stranger. An enemy is someone who is opposed to everything that you stand for. Everything that you do. He gets in your way. He is an adversary.

If while we were in that position of being opposed to everything that God was, to everything that God stood for, everything that God wanted—if while we were an enemy we were reconciled, meaning that God worked out the differences in our personal relationship so that we could be at peace—how much more now that we have been reconciled shall we be saved?

Doesn’t it make sense that if God could reach out to you and iron out your differences and embrace you while your back was turned to God when you didn’t care for him, when you were pushing him away, when you were living independent of him, when you weren’t giving him a second thought, how much more now that you have your hands out to God and want a relationship with God and want to please God will he save you? It is harder to love an enemy than a friend, and now you are a buddy of God’s. You are a child of God. You are in the house.

And the second contrast that Paul draws is between the death of his Son and his Son’s resurrection. Verse 10: “If, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more having been reconciled shall we be saved through his life!”

What an incredible argument. It makes me just stand back and go, “Yes!” Paul is saying that at the moment of Christ’s death, he saved us. If at the moment of his greatest weakness, the moment when darkness covered the

earth, when God suffered this humiliation, when the head of Jesus was bowed and he was stripped naked and his hands were fixed to a wooden cross so that he could not move and he was in utter agony, if at that moment, God saved you, how much more now that he has gloriously and powerfully resurrected will he be able to keep you until the end. If in his weakness, God could reach out and pull you out of the fire, while his hands were fixed to the cross, how much more now that he is boundlessly free and wondrously alive can God preserve you until the end.

Friends, if Jesus could save you from the cross, Jesus can certainly keep you now that he is risen and in heaven. What difference does meeting Jesus make? It will change your life, now and for eternity. Let's pray.