

Why The Bad Things Happen

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[0 : 00] Well, it's been a crazy week, hasn't it? For Capetownians especially. Not only was Tuesday, if you didn't know, the officially hottest day in Cape Town for the past 100 years at 42 degrees, its maximum temperature.

And at 2 o'clock in the afternoon, get this, Cape Town was the hottest place on the planet on Tuesday. So that's a claim to fame. But not only did we experience the hottest day of a while, but also on that day we were in the middle of, you probably noticed, one of the most destructive fires that we've seen in our city in decades.

It was a fire that started in Muesenberg and moved over a distance of 13 kilometers over the day since last Sunday, destroying 5,000 hectares of vegetation and a number of buildings.

Hundreds of people were evacuated from their homes and around 2,000 emergency workers were putting their lives on the line, non-stop, day and night, to control the blaze and to protect us.

It was a devastating few days. And I'm sure nobody here didn't notice what was going on. It was everywhere. It was on the TV, on the radio. And to make things even more interesting, the fire was finally doused with the help of a thunderstorm, of all things, on Wednesday. We don't often get thunderstorms in Cape Town.

[1 : 28] And it really was the answer to lots of people's prayers that God would send rain to help the brave firefighters on the front lines. And we're thankful to Him for doing that, for sending that rain and helping to douse the fire.

But few people stop to think that the same God who sent the rain to put out the fire is also the God who sent the fire in the first place.

The same God who created the beauty of nature also allowed it to be destroyed. You see, God, the fire was not out of His control. He was sovereign over that fire. He sent it. Why?

I mean, we've got to ask the question, in a time where things seem to be going, just falling apart and going into chaos in our world, which happens often, not just with fires like this, we've got to ask the question, if God is in control, why do things like this happen?

Maybe you asked that this week. Well, Scripture gives us a very clear reason for it. Scripture makes the reason quite clear. Scripture teaches us that these things are all a result of humanity's broken relationship with God.

[2 : 44] Even forest fires. But how can that be? How can our relationship with God affect our environment? Well, what we need to understand, and what we, especially in our culture, don't really understand that much, is that we as people are much more connected with our environment than we tend to think we are.

See, we are creatures. We are part of creation. We're not separate from it. We're connected to the world around us. And that also means when our relationship with God was broken through sin, when our relationship as people, as the pinnacle of His creation, was broken, that didn't just affect people.

It didn't just affect humans. It affected our entire world. Genesis tells us that when people turned from God, the ground was cursed. Not just people, not just humans, but our world, our environment, was affected when we turned away from relationship with God.

And so you see, when things like runaway fires or other natural disasters occur, they are there.

They are sent to us to remind us that our relationship with God is broken because of our sin.

And the whole world is feeling the effects of that. Those tortoises and snakes or whatever that perished in the fire, they did that.

[4 : 13] God allowed that because of our broken relationship with Him. You see, we are in charge of creation, and when we turn away from Him, creation feels the effects.

And God allows these things. In fact, He sends these things to remind us and to warn us of the state we're in. You know, that fire on the mountain this week was meant to remind us that the world is not at peace with God.

And it's meant to show us the destructive effects of not being at peace with God. And the reason is because we as people are not at peace with God. And that's why this morning's passage, which Michiel read for us, should come to us like that rain came on Wednesday as a relief.

Because you know what it says to us? It says to us, even though we by nature are not at peace with God, God has done something to change that. God has done something now to make peace possible between us and Him.

And that doesn't just affect us. It affects our whole world. And He did that, we've seen over the last few weeks, by undoing the effects of sin on the cross of Jesus Christ, when Jesus died there in the place of sinners, to swap places with those who trust in Him and give you His righteousness.

[5 : 39] When that happened, the effects of sin that had been holding the world captive for thousands of years started to be reversed, started to be undone.

Have a look at verse 1 of chapter 5. Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, we must never just read over that verse and carry on going without stopping and realizing how amazing, how incredible that is, that we, sinners, can have peace with the Holy God.

It goes beyond understanding. Another word that's used to describe that situation, peace with God, is the word reconciliation. Look down to verse 11, the last verse in the reading this morning.

You'll see it there. It says, We also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. That's another word that Paul uses to describe this new situation of peace that we can have with God.

[6 : 52] And the word reconciliation, it means the healing of a long broken relationship. That's what the word means. You may have experienced reconciliation with another person, maybe recently, after a fight, or a long period of not talking to them, or having something between you.

You know how it weighs down on you, don't you, when you've fallen out with someone, when you've had a fight with someone, especially someone close to you. When there's a rift in a relationship, you feel it, don't you?

You feel it every day. You wish you didn't. You wish you could just forget it and carry on with your life. But you feel it when there's a broken relationship with another person.

You can't sleep well. You know, you're disturbed. You might even lose your appetite. It just upsets you deep down inside. And you can't be happy until there's some kind of reconciliation, can you?

And then when there is, when you finally sit down with that person, and you work through the issue, and when there's finally reconciliation, and you apologize, it's such a weight off, isn't it?

[8 : 04] You felt that? You know what I'm talking about? When you feel that weight off, when you come to be reconciled with someone that you've had a long falling out with, to be in right relationship again, is like a breath of fresh air.

But now if we think that it's bad to have a broken relationship with another person, how much more so to have a broken relationship with your God, your Creator?

Because that relationship affects everything in your life. You see, when your relationship with your Creator is not at peace, whether you know it or not, you experience the burden of that.

That broken relationship. Just like creation around us experiences the burden. You know, the frustration and the destructive effects that it has on your life.

You may not admit that it's because of broken relationship with God, but that is the root cause. And you can never truly have peace unless that relationship is fixed.

[9 : 08] And maybe you're feeling that this morning. Maybe you're just feeling not at peace. And you know that deep down inside. Maybe this week, as the fire has been burning on the mountain, you've had your own personal fires inside.

Conflicts. That no one knows about. Struggles. Frustrations. Things that are just not going how they're supposed to. And you put on a happy face to the world around you, but there's something deep down inside that is not right.

Is that you this morning? Well, the first thing you need to do is realize why that is. You need to realize that the cause of that is broken relationship with your Creator.

That is the root cause of all your problems. And if you realize that, then the first priority in your life should be reconciliation with God.

That should trump all other priorities. If you realize that that is the root cause of all your problems. And then the second thing you must know is that reconciliation is now possible.

[10:18] What you need, more than anything else, is now possible, but only through Jesus Christ. Because He is the only person who has done something to deal with your sins against God that has broken that relationship when He died on the cross.

And so it's as you put your trust in Him, and listen to Him, and follow Him, it's only then that you can ever find peace with God. Let me assure you of that this morning. You will never find peace apart from Jesus Christ.

And so if you have not yet found peace with God through Jesus, if you're not reconciled to God, and you know it, you may have been coming to church for ages, you may call yourself a Christian and say all the right things, but you know deep down inside you are not reconciled with your Creator, then don't waste any time.

Don't waste any time. Come speak to me. I would love to pray with you after the service. No one else needs to know. If you know that you are not at peace with God, and this morning you feel that He is calling you back to Him, and you know you need to take a step, come to me.

Speak to me. Or take one of these feedback forms, and just put your name in, and fill out that first block, like more info about becoming a follower of Jesus Christ, and put it in the box at the back when you leave.

[11:38] And then someone will contact you. It's important. You need to do something. If you are not at peace with God, He has done everything for you, but you need to respond to that. And if you haven't, don't waste any more time.

Because if you are not following Christ, the reason you must, is that He is the only way that you will ever find peace with God. But now if you are, if you are following Christ, if you have found reconciliation with God, if you know the peace that comes, despite the difficulties in life, you know the peace of being in right relationship with God through Christ, then I want you to know two consequences that this has in your daily life, that we go on to see in this passage.

Two consequences that being at peace with God will now have, how it will come out in your daily life. And the first one we see is access to grace.

That's the first consequence of being at peace with God. Access to grace. Have a look at verse 1. 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. Okay, so those who have faith in Jesus Christ have now gained access into this grace. Now, that's a very interesting phrase.

[13:05] What does it mean? You would have expected Paul to say something like they've gained access to God or they've gained access to heaven. But why does he say they've gained access to this grace? What it means literally when he says that we've gained access to grace, it means that we've moved into a whole new realm of living, a whole new way of living and relating to God that no other person outside of Christ can experience.

namely, this realm of grace. Which is, what is this realm of grace? It is a place where you know that you need to do nothing to be accepted by God because you already are.

That's what grace is. Grace means unconditional acceptance and favor. And it's funny how many humans so long to experience that.

If you look around in our world, everybody wants to actually be in that place where they know that they've got nothing to, they don't need to do anything to be accepted but hardly anybody is there. Because, you know, we're constantly wanting to be accepted, aren't we? It's in our nature to strive for acceptance from people around us, our society, our friends and it affects whether you like it or not.

[14:24] That need for acceptance affects what you wear, it affects how you speak, how you use language, what words you use, it affects everything you do, what your priorities are in life, what you spend your time on, what you spend your money on.

All of that is affected by our need to be accepted by a particular group or society or particular people. And the same is true for people's relationship with God.

That instinct also comes through inevitably in how we relate to God. You know, typical religion, man-made religion, is all about what we must do, how we must live to be accepted by God and people flock to those religions.

I mean, I don't like to make it a habit of bashing other churches but the Catholic Church around the corner, that's a religion based on what we must do to be accepted by God and every morning I drive past on the way to St. Mark's and you see the cars piling up, people flocking to that, people flock to mosques, people flock to any form of religion where you are told what you need to do to be accepted by God because of this underlying human need for acceptance.

It's fed by religion, you see. But, for those who put their trust in Christ, we've moved from that.

[15 : 47] We've moved from the realm of religion, that realm of needing to find acceptance, we've moved to a realm of grace where we can know that we are already accepted and there's nothing we need to do.

And if we're accepted by the God of the universe, who cares about what other people think? You know, we can be free of this need to be accepted if we live in a realm of grace through Jesus Christ. And nobody else can experience that place except a believer in Christ. Everybody else lives the way they do to be accepted by something or someone.

We live the way we do because we already are. And make no mistake, that is the fundamental difference between following Christ and any human religion and any other way of living in fact. We live, we do what we do because we are already accepted by God. And you must never forget that as a Christian. A Christian is to stand.

[16 : 54] You see, Paul says, in this grace in which we stand. A Christian is to stand, to stand firmly day by day in this realm of grace. But you need to make sure you're doing that.

That you come back to stand in this realm of grace. When you feel inadequate for God and you will. When you feel that you haven't done enough and you will.

When you struggle to be who you want to and that's eating away at you, it's then that you need to stand in this grace. It's then that you need to remember that there's nothing more you need to do to be accepted by God because you already are.

Because Jesus has done everything, everything for you already. there's nothing you need to do if you believe in Christ. And so, you know what that does?

That frees you up. It frees you up to serve God joyfully without ever wondering, have I done enough? You don't ever need to wonder that if you've trusted in Christ. And that's the first result we see here of reconciliation with God.

[17 : 58] It's access to this new way of living. To stand in this realm of grace. Unconditional acceptance. the second result though is the hope of glory.

That's the second result of knowing that you're at peace with God through Jesus Christ. Have a look at verse 2. Paul says, we boast or rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

Now, that's a very interesting word he uses. The word boast or it's translated in some versions rejoice. It means the same thing. But he uses the same word in chapter 3 verse 27 when he described boasting in a negative context.

Do you remember that? When he described people who boast about their own achievements. And no doubt they do that to be accepted by the people around them. That's really what, that's at the root of boasting.

If we boast about what we do, it's because we want acceptance from people. But you see, when we stand in the realm of grace, we boast instead of in what we've achieved, we boast in what God has achieved for us.

[19 : 08] And that's the kind of boasting or rejoicing that Paul is talking about here. And specifically we boast in the hope of the glory of God. And that's another interesting phrase.

You'll find that when Paul writes as a mouthpiece of God, as an apostle, he uses these phrases, just a couple of words that are just packed with meaning, that you've got to unpack.

So what does this phrase mean? The hope of the glory of God? Well, glory is a really profound concept in the Bible, just that word glory.

First and foremost, it refers to God's glory, which is all his excellent attributes on display for us to enjoy and soak up. That's God's glory, seeing him as he truly is.

In fact, that, seeing God, realizing who God truly is, being in the right relationship with him, and just soaking up his glory, that is what we were made for. That is what you exist for, to enjoy God's glory

to the fullest.

[20 : 16] You know, just as sponges were made to soak up water, we were made to soak up God's glory, to experience and enjoy God to the full.

And that is by far the greatest happiness and thrill that we can ever experience. No earthly pleasure, no physical pleasure or emotional pleasure that we can ever experience on earth ever comes close to experiencing the glory of God.

And yet, because of our sin, we don't. Romans 3 23 says, we have fallen short of the glory of God. And so we're like dried out sponges in the middle of the desert with no water to soak up in this world. Because of our sin, we've been cut off from what we were made for.

And that's why Jesus came. You see, Jesus came to restore that relationship, to bring you back to God so that you can soak up His glory again.

[21 : 25] like you were made for. For eternity. Forever and ever and ever without end. You know, we chase after happiness in all the wrong places, don't we?

And we're all guilty of that. We chase after happiness, we look for happiness in TV shows, entertainment, hobbies, holidays, family, whatever.

And these are all good things. But you and I both know that the happiness that they ever give us is only short and fleeting and temporary, isn't it? At best.

We've got to know that the only way we will find true and lasting happiness is in relationship with God and experiencing His glory and soaking it up unhindered by our sin.

Here's another, I'm just taking the illustration further as I go, that sponge. Our sin is like shrink wrap on a dry sponge. Even if you put it near the water, it's separated from the water.

[22 : 30] The water is never going to go. And Jesus takes off the shrink wrap. He takes off the sin to allow us to soak up God's glory and be who we were made to be again. And in the gospel, we have a sure hope, a sure hope that we will be there experiencing God's glory forever as we were made to be in a new creation.

That's the hope we have now that we have peace with God. But, notice, that it's a hope of something still to come. It's a hope that we haven't yet come to.

That's why it's a hope. In the meantime, we still have to live in this broken world, and we still have to suffer its effects, the effects of our own sin. But the difference, you see, the difference is that we can now see the sufferings and the brokenness of this world when we experience it.

We can see it as something temporary, because we know what's coming. And that changes everything. And so look at how the passage goes on in verse 3. Have a look. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings.

We glory in our sufferings. Another translation says we rejoice in our sufferings. Now, that seems insane. Who on earth rejoices in their sufferings?

[23 : 53] Well, those who see their sufferings in light of something much bigger. Those who see their sufferings as just a temporary means of getting somewhere else.

You see, when you see your sufferings as just temporary, then it changes everything, doesn't it? Let me give you an example that I've used before. I want you to imagine that you are sitting in the most uncomfortable seat in an economy class airplane.

It's packed with people and the air conditioner is not working properly. The tray table is stuck. The person in front of you has put their seat all the way back and you didn't even know it could go this far back.

The person next to you is sleeping half over your seat and snoring so loudly you didn't think was humanly possible. You've just realized they forgot to put on deodorant that morning.

This is by far the most uncomfortable you've ever been. Now how would you react in that situation? You'd probably be pretty grumpy wouldn't you? I would.

[24 : 56] You'd be irritated. You'd want to be anywhere but there. But what if there was a bigger picture? What if this flight that you're on was a gift which was taking you to an all expenses paid year long round the world cruise on a luxury liner with all your family and friends and it's going to be the most incredible time you've ever experienced and all you've got to do to get there is sit for a few hours in economy class on this uncomfortable plane.

Now what would your attitude be then? I think it would be quite different wouldn't it? You'd still not prefer to be there but suddenly it's something you can tolerate because it's a small price to pay for what's to come.

See and that's how Christians are to see sufferings in this life. If we've been reconciled to God those sufferings whatever they are they are still infinitesimally small in comparison to an eternity in glory.

Paul was a man the apostle Paul he knew sufferings more than most of us and he says even of his worst sufferings he says in 2 Corinthians our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

Can you say that about your sufferings? A well-known American pastor was diagnosed recently with a brain tumor and he was told that he only had a few years to live and he had small children who he realized he would never be able to see grow up he would never be able to see get married and he was interviewed about the diagnosis and he said he was still able to rejoice even in that situation and the reason why he was still able to rejoice even in that suffering was he said this more than I need to think of right now I need to think of the glory God has promised to me.

[27 : 02] If I'm thinking 10,000 years from now then I can say with Paul this is light and momentary and that's what Christians have got to get into the habit of doing we've got to think 10,000 years in the future.

In that respect when we're thinking of what's to come our sufferings here whatever they are whether it's a brain tumor whether it's being arrested or you know our life being threatened they are light and momentary in light of the eternal glory to come.

But more than that we can actually rejoice in them. because like that uncomfortable airplane they are the very means by which God is taking us there to glory.

Our sufferings he uses our sufferings to keep us we saw last week to strengthen our faith to hold us close to him to bring us to glory and we see that in verse 3 just have a look quickly not only so but we also glory in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance.

perseverance character and character hope. You see our sufferings as Christians are the means by which God builds and secures our hope in what's to come.

[28 : 14] And in your Bible studies this week which I trust you go to you'll examine this verse much deeper and you'll see how God actually builds our hope and secures our hope through our sufferings but we don't have time to look into that.

What I want to briefly do is go on to the next verse 5. Have a look at that. 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.

And so here Paul describes that Christian hope of the coming glory as something we can be sure of. It's not something that we have to wonder if we're going there.

As Christians we can be absolutely sure of it. It won't put us to shame he says. We won't get there and realize that we were wrong. And of course you know that hope can only be a true comfort in suffering if it is sure.

Your hope will never be a comfort in suffering if you're not sure of it. But we can be sure of it. And the reason is Paul argues because we've already experienced God's love in the present.

[29 : 24] That's why we can be sure of the future. And how do we experience God's love? How do you experience God's love? In the gospel. That's how you experience the love of God.

Have a look at verse 6. This is how Paul goes on to explain how we can be sure of our hope. You see just at the right time when we were still powerless Christ died for the ungodly.

Very rarely will someone die for a righteous person. Though for a good person 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.

Okay what is the ultimate expression of human love? Well it's sacrifice isn't it? It's sacrificing your life for someone else. That's the ultimate expression of love.

But humans would only ever do that for someone that at least they like or respect. But God did that for people who hated him.

[30 : 23] and who were unworthy of any respect. While we were still sinners and reprehensible sinners at that it was then that Christ died for us.

And you know what that means? You know what it proves to us? It proves to you and me that God's love for you if you believe the gospel is stronger and more reliable than any human's love for you. and you can rely on that love that God has already shown you in the past to bring you to glory in the future. And so to believe the gospel is also to believe that you are loved beyond your wildest

dreams and that that love will preserve you into eternity and it is certain.

So you can't say, you can't say, I don't think God loves me and also say, well I believe the gospel because the gospel is the message that God loves you beyond you can never know.

Do you believe that? And if you do, how do we respond? If you know that you now have peace with God, that you have acceptance through grace, that you have a certain hope of glory, that his love has been poured into your heart, that you know he loves you through Jesus Christ, how do you respond to all this?

[31 : 54] Well, to close, let's look at how Paul tells us to respond. He tells us to boast in it. He tells us to rejoice in it. We see that all over the passage, don't we?

This instruction to boast in these things, which means to make them known, to celebrate them, to remind each other of them, and to tell other people about them. And specifically, as we close, I want us to see three things in particular that we must go out of this place and boast about.

First, at the end of verse 2, we are to boast, in our hope. That means never forget where you're going. Remember your hope as a Christian and remind your fellow Christians of that hope when they forget it, because let me tell you, we will forget it.

We tend to forget that in the here and now of life. We tend to forget our hope, and we as Christians need to stick together and remind each other of where we're going. And we must get into the habit, as one writer says, of regularly raising our glasses and drinking to our eternal future.

What a great picture that is. That's how our life should be characterized as Christians. Secondly, verse 3, we are to boast or rejoice in our sufferings. And so when you feel the effects of this broken world, when you suffer, remember that these sufferings are the means by which God is taking you to your eternal hope, and they are light and momentary compared to what's waiting for you.

[33 : 31] And then third, in verse 11, we are now to boast in our God. God, which means we must never keep quiet about the incredible God we have and all that he's done to reconcile lost sinners to himself.

Because that is the message that every lost sinner needs to hear. You see, in a world like we were reminded of this week, in a world that's not at peace with God, humanity's greatest need is reconciliation with him.

But it's through Jesus alone that that is possible. And so, as Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians, he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. In other words, our job as Christians on earth is to show people where to find peace with God, and that's the only reason he hasn't taken you into glory yet.

So that you can boast in him to your lost friends and your lost family members while you still have a chance. Boast in our hope, boast in our sufferings, and boast in our God.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we have been reminded again this morning of all that you have done for us to make peace with you possible.

[34 : 54] Oh Lord, we do pray that you would help us to live out our lives in light of what you've done. Help us to live in this realm of grace that you have now made available to us.

Help us to know the security and the comfort of being accepted by you through Christ. And in response, would you help us to rejoice and boast in what you've done for us, in our hope, even in our sufferings, and in who you are as our incredible God.

Lord, help us to be witnesses to that fact. Every day we live in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.