

“JOYFUL IN SUFFERINGS.”

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Scripture Texts: Romans 5:1-5

Introduction.

Rejoice in our sufferings. Could Paul have said anything more *unamerican*? Who wants to rejoice in our sufferings? What could be more counter-intuitive? Who would be so crazy as to put those two words together in the same sentence? Rejoice and suffering. Isn't that an oxymoron?

You know, like act naturally, deafening silence, original copy, accurate estimate, virtual reality, crash landing, awfully good, seriously funny. And now we can add joyful sufferings.

Rejoice in our suffering.

Paul knows this point is hard to understand, so he expands on it to help us know why and how we can rejoice in our sufferings. He states three truths to show us why and how we can rejoice in our sufferings.

Suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, character produces hope, which does not put us to shame.

Suffering produces endurance.

Is this true? For much of mankind suffering, trials, tribulations result in murmuring, grumbling, complaining, bitterness, cursing, anger with God. Let's be honest with ourselves, we are by nature impatient, unwilling to submit to the painful providences of God. We are like the Israelites, murmuring and complaining, whining to God.

How does suffering produce the fruit of endurance and patience? It does in a person who by faith receives the trial as from God, ordained by God, being used by God for good. This is a person under the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit, who is submitting to God's purposes, God's discipline. Patient endurance implies submission to God's work.

God puts us under pressure to improve us, to build our strength to endure. Like a personal trainer who pushes us toward a good goal. God sends difficulties in life to teach us perseverance and patience. Suffering brings about endurance.

What this doesn't mean?

What kind of joy is this? This is not sadistic pleasure in pain, giving high fives when crisis hits. This is not saying we can only be happy when we are miserable.

It doesn't mean we shouldn't dread troubles or flee from them when we are able. It doesn't mean that we don't feel distressed when they come, or that they don't taste bitter to us. If they weren't painful or distasteful, then there would be no need for endurance or patience in them. Endurance implies they are hard, challenging, test us to the max.

Hebrews 12:11 says no discipline, correction, chastening is pleasant in the moment, it's grievous.

Sometimes God sends afflictions that are crushing, we can hardly breath. Sometimes God's children cry out in great distress and loud complaint. "How long, O Lord?" is a common cry in the OT and in the Psalms. But it is a complaint made in faith, pressing into God.

If something happens in your life that is hard or painful or frustrating or disappointing, and, by grace, your faith looks to Christ, and you trust His power, His sufficiency, His wisdom and love, and you don't give in to bitterness, resentment and complaining, then by faith you have endured. By faith you have joy in God's good purposes at work in you.

Endurance produces character.

What kind of character do you have? What comes out of you when you are in a hard place, when you are under pressure? Do you grumble, complain, whine? Do you say why me?

Are you soft, a wimp under pressure, or are you strong? Do you crumble or stand firm? Suffering will have two outcomes, bitterness or humility, impatience or patience.

Suffering has convinced many people God is not good, or not even real, that faith is worthless. Their misconceptions of God, their American god has let them down. They are like the seed in the parable of the sower that fell on the ground, quickly grew up, but then withered under life's troubles. It shows what we are made of, it reveals our weaknesses or shallow faith.

God is always at work to improve us, to test our metal, to strengthen us, to grow and change us, to put us into the refiner's fire. God puts us to the test to remove the dross, the impurities.

God is a consuming fire, but this is a refining fire, a purifying fire, a purging fire, not a fire to destroy. We are impure by nature, we are full of rough edges, so God goes to work. It is humbling work. In the furnace of affliction character is forged and made stronger. We come out wiser, humble, more compassionate, deeper faith and more sure loyalty to our God.

People like to point out where diamonds come from, they come from time and pressure. God puts us under pressure, so endurance brings character, proven character that is authentic, genuine, tested and tried. How do we get there without affliction?

I Peter 1:6-7 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than

gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

God doesn't just turn it to good, He turns it to gold.

People who have suffered have the richest experiences of God's grace, mercy, compassion, peace, love. They have the deepest prayers, the most intimate intimacy. Where sorrow abounds, the consolations of God abound even more.

We all know godly saints who have been formed and fashioned by God through their suffering into beautiful reflections of Jesus. Who in our church would you put your money on? Who is the strongest, has suffered the most? Show me the godliest person and I will show you someone who has been tried by fire. I have seen what trials do to purify souls.

Betty Hilverda died in 2019 at 83. At 15 she developed juvenile rheumatoid arthritis. She endured over 20 surgeries, and didn't know a day without pain. If you knew her, you wouldn't know, no complaining, no self-pity, a sweet, gentle spirit. She didn't let her suffering define her or turn her bitter or make her a victim, but it did refine her, giving her a proven character.

II Corinthians 4:17 This light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

Glory is gained no other way. Jesus entered heaven with scars and so must we. Suffering prepares Christians for a far greater reward, a far greater glory, and that is cause for rejoicing.

Character produces hope that doesn't put us to shame.

In other words, when we see the fruitful effects of suffering, and the genuineness of our faith, then we have a greater assurance of the hope of our future glory.

The hope we have because of the justification of God by faith in the blood of Jesus, is now confirmed to be real by its testing, and our passing the test.

When we see our faith stand firm, when we see it is real, that we are not a fake Christian, living on borrowed faith, or your parent's faith, or an cheap American faith. Growing endurance and character give us confidence we are God's children.

Our hope will not be disappointed. It never puts us to shame because it is certain, guaranteed, it cannot fail us or let us down. Affliction is used by God to increase and strengthen believers' confidence in God.

God wants you to have absolute confidence you are going to inherit glory. And He wants you to know this not just as a truth, but as a personal experience of God's love poured into your hearts through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Rom. 8:18).

“When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” (Col. 3:4).

In other words, our hope is the glad anticipation of a future certainty, the return of Jesus Christ.

So how can we rejoice or exalt in our sufferings?

The only person who can rejoice in their sufferings is a Christian, a person who has faith in a heavenly Father, whom they trust only to give good gifts, believing suffering is appointed by Him for a good effect, a good end.

We glory in them by faith, confident in the God who is sovereign over them.

We see the fruit of affliction in our lives, endurance, patience, humility, character, hope.

We have reason to rejoice when we see the good that comes from it and the glory that awaits us.

We see God’s love for us, as He disciplines those He loves.

We can rejoice when we see from a spiritual perspective our grievous sufferings don’t deprive us of our joy, but increase it.

By faith we believe behind everything that happens to us, there is meaning and purpose. God is always up to something, nothing is random, accidental, arbitrary. God is intimately involved in the tiniest details of our lives. Not a hair falls from our head without, not just the knowledge of our Father, but without the will of our Father. Not a cancer cell grows without His will and purpose. Not an accident, injury, loss or death occurs without the purposeful will of God.

We rejoice because God is God.

Implications and application.

This past week I had five encounters with serious suffering, physical suffering, relational suffering, moral suffering. Heart wrenching, crushing suffering. The kind of suffering that takes your breath away, that leaves you speechless. All you can say is, “Lord, have mercy.”

How many of us have been saddened or grieved by the suffering in the Middle East, as those images have been brought into our homes? What depth of human sorrow?

When someone encounters serious suffering one of two things can happen, it will drive us into God or drive us away from God.

As I have related in the past my favorite math teacher in high school had a daughter die from leukemia and after that abandon his faith in God. If that’s the kind of God He is then he wanted nothing to do with Him.

My best friend comes from a family of seven children. His parents buried four sons. Four sons. I know there are several people here how have buried a child. But four children, one 20, another 5, another a baby. In the midst of that someone said something to his mother about what was happening and she said, God is God. God will do what God does, God is God. She didn't like what was happening, she was brokenhearted, but she stood absolutely firm. God is God.

Either God is the sovereign and supreme authority in all the universe, either God is all powerful, perfect, wise and good, or we are completely without hope and help, and everything is futile and meaningless and hopeless.

Either we are living adrift in a hopeless, meaningless universe in chaos; or we are created, loved, upheld by a sovereign God. There is no in-between.

I would rather follow a God who is wise enough and powerful enough to cause all suffering to work for His glory and our good, than to follow Satan who causes all suffering to work for evil.

Rejoicing is the only way to stay sane, the only way to guard our hearts from becoming bitter. If you don't exalt in your tribulations you will become bitter and fall into despair.

If you are young, you may not have the faith and spiritual maturity to handle it when something bad happens, something terrible, something you don't want. You need to settle in your mind and heart right now who God is and what He is like. You need to get a firm faith that can stand in the storms and floods and earthquakes of life, because they are coming.

Learn to say thy will be done whatever that will may be, not my will.
Learn to say if it pleases God, it pleases me. Learn to say God is God.

Parents, prepare your children so they aren't surprised by suffering and so they don't despise it, but humble themselves under it and entrust themselves to God through it.

Hurricane Otis hit Mexico so fast and so hard they didn't have time to prepare for it.

Jesus said in this life we will have suffering. Take Jesus at His Word, take Paul at His Word. If you are expecting something to happen, you prepare for it. Live ready. Think differently. Change your perspective. Have the same mind as Jesus.

Don't flee from God in suffering, don't run away, don't start doubting in the dark what you knew in the light. Don't lose your grip on God. Stand firm. Weep, cry, pray, anguish, plead with God, say "How long, O Lord" but never stop believing. Never doubt the love of God. His discipline is proof you are His son or daughter, just as parents prove their love by disciplining their children.

When you are in the midst of your crisis, ask God to show Himself to you, ask God to give you spiritual eyes, spiritual perspective, to see this from His side. Ask Him to give you endurance, Christ like character. Ask Him to use this for His glory, to make His name great, to use it redemptively as He has promised.

Look on God's own Son bleeding to death in the most excruciating pain known to man and have faith in your suffering Savior. Jesus entered heaven through much tribulation and so must we.

If you hope in God thought faith in Jesus Christ, then I guarantee you will never be put to shame, God will not abandon you. He loves you and all His gifts prove it, as we will see more clearly next week.

I Peter 4:19 Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

Prayer: Holy Father, send your Spirit upon us and grant us a glimpse of the glory that awaits as we patiently bear these light and momentary trials in this life. Enable us to trust our souls to our faithful Savior who suffered and died for us. Fill us with your Holy Spirit, increase in us His patience, peace, wisdom and strength, enable us to live this life in faith so we can have joy in what you give us and hope in your promises. Thank you for being with us always. In your name we pray, Amen.