

# Exult in Tribulations

## Romans 5:3-5

- 1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
- 2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.
- 3 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance;
- 4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope.
- 5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

In chapter 5 here Paul is writing about the assurances or benefits that we have because we have been justified by faith. We saw last time from verses 1-2 that means we have peace with God, access into grace in which we stand, and exulting in hope of the glory of God. So Paul continues to list the blessings of being right with God in verse 3 by saying, "**And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations.**" We can all exult, rejoice, and glory in our future hope of God's glory. But Paul uses the same word in verse 3 to say that we glory, exult, or rejoice in tribulation.

### What does Paul mean by tribulation?

February 15<sup>th</sup> marked one year since the Islamic State slaughtered 21 Egyptian Christians. Believers throughout Egypt gathered after this brutal slaughter to pray for the victim's families. A brother of one of the believers killed is quoted saying, "We had a hope that they would be released... But the will of God was for them to be martyrs of Christ, and that is better than life. They kept the faith until the last moment. We are proud of them."

In many places around the world Christians who aren't killed are often subjected to brutal torture and brainwashing - attempts to force them to recant their faith. Christian women are brutally raped to break their allegiance to Christ, while children are sold into slavery. Thousands more languish year after year in prisons or hard labor camps.

When Paul says in Romans 5:3, "**And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations**" - when he says this, Paul is not speaking as a spectator but a fellow-sufferer. Paul's sufferings were long and hard. You can read about them in the book of Acts and he lists some of his tribulations in 2 Corinthians 11. In 2 Corinthians 12:9, he wrote, "**Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.**" When he said that he most gladly "boasts" in his weaknesses he uses the same word that he used here in Romans 5 for rejoice, glory, or exult. Paul practiced what he preached.

And Paul shows what he means by "weaknesses" in the next verse, 2 Cor 12:10, "**Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**" I believe that the whole array of distresses and weaknesses and sicknesses and difficulties are meant by these tribulations in Romans 5:3, not just persecutions. And Paul says he exults in them.

Is that how you face your afflictions? Do you have the same kind of rejoicing in them that you have when you think of heaven?

Some of you are in tribulation and anguish right now. I don't know all the afflictions you are going through, but I know some. In this congregation I know ...

- several people living with unbearable stress
- some living with the uncertainty of not having a diagnosis
- many people flooded with financial distress
- more than one living with cancer
- people with heart problems
- parents grieving the loss of a child
- one who is struggling to recover from surgery
- a family that is barely hanging together
- teenagers who are going through extremely difficult times
- several family members who are unemployed
- parents concerned for their adult children who have wandered from the faith
- family members who are struggling with alcohol, drug, or other addictions
- people living with chronic pain

There are many more troubles you have today that I did not mention. Some of you are suffering silently right now because you can't even talk about the trials you are going through. The word tribulation here means to be pressed down or put under extreme pressure. Anything pressure in life that threatens your faith in the goodness and power and wisdom of God is tribulation. These are normal for Christians. If anyone told you that coming to Christ would remove all the troubles of life, they lied to you. Paul taught all the churches, according to Acts 14:22, "**We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.**" Jesus said in John 16:33, "**In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.**"

Tribulations are a fact of living in this fallen world, so we all need to learn what God's Word tells us about how to handle them. Here in Romans 5 Paul shows why God allows believers to go through tribulation: because through the trials, we grow in endurance, proven character, and hope. And our hope will not disappoint, because even now God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Exulting in tribulations is the consistent message of the New Testament. Jesus taught (Matt. 5:11-12), "**Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**" James (1:2-3) says the same thing: "**My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.**" Peter teaches the same (1 Pet. 4:13): "**but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.**"

In the Book of Acts we find that the apostles had this response to trials. When the apostles were beaten and warned not to speak in the name of Jesus, we read (Acts 5:41), **“So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.”** When Paul and Silas were illegally beaten, imprisoned, and fastened into the stocks in the Philippian jail, we read (Acts 16:25), **“But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.”**

So how can we exult in tribulations? How can we rejoice when we face trials of various kinds?

### **1. Know that God uses tribulations to shape us and give us hope.**

Look at verse 3-4 again:

**3 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance;**

**4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope.**

Don't miss the word, “knowing.” There are so many things we don't know. We don't know why cancer hits one person and not another. We don't know why the brakes failed. We don't know why the money didn't come in. We don't know why our child struggles and another excels. We don't know why the tornado touched down in this town but not in that one.

But this we do know—**“all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”** That's Romans 8:28. But how do they work together for good? One part of the answer is Romans 5:3-4. The sufferings of life work together for good because they promote our spiritual growth. That's a radical thought. For most of us, trials are merely something to be endured. We grit our teeth, we grin and bear it—if we grin at all. Paul says we rejoice in the hard times because we know that God is working in the hard times to produce something beautiful in us.

The Bible does not encourage us to deny reality, put on a happy face, and pretend that we're just praising the Lord, when in fact we're hurting inside. Later in Romans (12:15), Paul says, **“weep with those who weep.”**

So there's nothing wrong with feeling sorrow or pain or grief in the midst of a difficult trial. We shouldn't deny these feelings in an attempt to look more spiritual. But through our tears and pain, we should be sustained by our hope in the promises of God. We know that He is sovereign over all things and that He cares for us. Exulting in our tribulations does not mean denying the pain. It means joyfully keeping in mind that God is sovereign and that He is using these trials to make us more like Christ.

Paul shows us the process that God uses to shape us, **“tribulation produces perseverance, and perseverance, character; and character, hope.”**

#### **a. Tribulation produces perseverance.**

The word perseverance means “to bear up under, to abide under” something. It is “the ability to remain in a difficult situation without giving in or giving up.” It is the endurance that not only survives trouble but is made stronger by it.

You don't develop perseverance unless you go through trials. You don't have to endure when everything is going your way. It's not difficult to trust the Lord when you're experiencing nothing but blessings. But will you endure by faith when life is hard? Will you trust God and submit to His mighty hand when you lose your job or when you're going through a hard time in your marriage or when you're diagnosed with a serious disease?

I'm sure you've heard the story of the young man who asked the preacher to pray that he would develop more patience. So the pastor bowed his head and prayed, "Lord, please send this young man more trials. He's had it too easy, Lord. Send him some hard times." When the young man protested that he had asked for patience not hard times, the pastor showed him the Scripture that says, "tribulation produces patience."

#### **b. Perseverance produces proven character.**

Proven character--this is a single word in Greek that means something that has passed the test. It comes out approved. The word was used of silver ore that had been passed through the fire so that all the dross was removed. The pure silver that was left was proven. It was the "real thing." In a similar sense, we speak of a person having a "sterling" character.

Peter uses this idea in speaking about trials in 1 Peter 1:6-7, **"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ."**

When you go through a trial trusting in God, your faith becomes proven. You've been through the test and passed. You know by experience that you can lean on His faithfulness. It proves that you're not just a flash in the pan Christian, like the seed on the shallow soil, which faded quickly under the heat of trials.

Ray Stedman said it this way: God is in the process of making veterans. He delights to take raw, untested rookies and put them in the crucible. When they come out, they aren't raw or untested and they aren't rookies anymore. They're veterans, men and women of "proven character." Perseverance produces proven character.

#### **c. Proven character produces hope.**

Once suffering has done its work, we have first perseverance, then tested character, and finally hope—the confident expectation that we will not be disappointed. When we discover in the pain that God is there to sustain us, that gives us hope to keep on going. What starts with suffering ends with hope.

As God completes his work in us, we see ourselves becoming kinder, gentler, more compassionate, less irritable, wiser, and more trustworthy--Christlike. We look back and say, "He's doing it! God is keeping his promises!" The suffering is real, but the end result is that we are refined, purified, tested, and strengthened by the things we have suffered.

Best of all, we discover that our sufferings have an eternal reward: **"Hope does not disappoint."** Not in this life or in the life to come. Nothing is wasted in a believer's life. Our worst trials are down payments on something wonderful to come.

Our hope is not in a trouble-free life, but rather in a glorious, trouble-free eternity. To exult in our present trials, we have to keep our focus on the hope of the glory of God, which we will experience in heaven. Paul writes in 2 Cor 4:17, **“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”**

Some critics complain that Christianity is just “pie in the sky by and by when you die.” To that I say, “Yes, you’re going to die. Would you like pie with that or no pie?” Most of us are fully aware of the approach of death—graying and thinning hair, failing eyesight and hearing, and increasing aches and pains. All these are broadcasting a clear message to your brain, which can’t remember things any more: You’re going to die! Either you have the hope of heaven because you have trusted in Jesus Christ to forgive all your sins, or you have no hope. The only way to exult in trials is to develop and remember the sure hope of heaven.

To exult in tribulations, know that God is using them to shape your character and strengthen your hope.

“But,” you might be thinking, “what about God’s love? If God really loves us, wouldn’t He spare us all of these trials?”

That is what Paul teaches next,

## **2. Know in tribulation that God loves us.**

### **5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.**

Paul not see suffering as an indication that God does not love us. In Romans 8 Paul will say that neither tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword can separate us from God’s great love. Here’s a radical thought. Suffering actually gives us the assurance that God loves us. God loves us too much to deliver us from all our struggles. He wants us to rejoice, to persevere, to have our character changed, and to give us hope. This can *only* come about through difficulties.

Keep your focus on God’s love and you can exult in tribulations.

God’s love poured out in our hearts. The word is in the perfect tense, which means that we could translate it “has been poured out like a river and is continually being poured out moment-by-moment.” Those who know Jesus have the continual experience of the love of God being poured into their hearts.

The very moment you say “yes” to Jesus, the Holy Spirit enters your heart and begins to pour out the love of God. He “turns on the spigot” and out flows the love of God—not in dribbles or drops, but in a mighty rushing torrent. You won’t be disappointed. I can promise you that. You’ll never regret your decision to say “yes” to Jesus Christ.