

Paul's discourse has been a very profound one up to this point. He has successfully set forth the proposition that the essence of our salvation lies entirely on God who has made the way for our justification, so that we may have eternal life with Him. And the means of entering into this relationship is solely on faith in God who made the promise and then fulfilled it in Christ.

Using Abraham as an example Paul bounds from one point to another declaring that Abraham was given the promise of the Messiah coming through his seed.

He was told that he would have a son despite the fact that he was nearly 100 years old and that Sarah was barren and 90 years old herself.

Paul then exclaims that Abraham still believed that God would be true to His word and in that promise Abraham would not waver, and because of his faith in the Lord, it was credited to him as righteousness. His faith grew strong and he gave glory to God.

And then, as if to bring this great news of salvation by grace through faith in the Messiah, Jesus Christ, to a crescendo, Paul goes on to show how this promise was not for Abraham alone, but for all of us as well who believe in Christ for the forgiveness of our sins.

Rom 4:23-25 "The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, 24 but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness--for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. 25 He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification."

The excitement builds as Paul then brings all of this into perspective.

Rom 5:1-2 "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 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."

This is amazing! We don't have to somehow attempt to enter into a relationship with God based on our own good works, or our own righteousness, which by the way we don't possess. But we are

given the righteousness of Jesus Christ Himself which is put to our account as we accept, by faith, His atonement for our sin.

It doesn't get any better than this!"And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God." (vs.2b)

That's what you thought. But, Paul says there's more you didn't even consider.

Rom 5:3 "Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings...."
Excuse me.... check please.

'I was with you up to that point Drew. I was rejoicing with you about being justified before God through faith in Christ. I was rejoicing with you about being at peace with God through our Lord Jesus, and I'm rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God, but this idea of rejoicing in sufferings? I'm not so sure.'

And you know what?, this is the state of mind that many people in the world are in today. 'I'm with you God as long as there's something in it for me, or where I can experience happiness all the time and never have to worry about another problem in this world.'

We may not say those things consciously, but, the first time suffering comes along we begin to ask the God who loved us so much that He sent His only begotten Son into this world to die for our sins, 'What's up God? It seems you've been derailed from keeping me happy.'

And we come to a passage from God's very word like the one before us and we wonder what deranged human being could make such a statement as, "we also rejoice in our sufferings?"

Let's stop and take a moment to look at what Paul is saying in the context of this letter to the Romans where Abraham has been at the center of the discussion for the entire last chapter.

Abraham's life was characterized by sufferings of various types, not the least of which was a command from God to wander around the land of Canaan as a nomad.

That may not sound like suffering to you and me but in those days in the Mid-east, and even with most today in the Mid-east, the possession of land is vital to families, where the father has the honor to give to his eldest son the inheritance which that father nurtured in the form of land.

That's why it shouldn't surprise us today that what the Israelis and the Arabs are fighting about is land. Possession of land, which is holy to both parties, because they both believe it was given to them by their heavenly Father as an inheritance.

But what would appear to be an insult and further injury to Abraham is that he is told by God that he will have a son to receive the inheritance from his hand, even though he's too old to have a son.

'Okay God, I'm wandering in this land to which you've promised me. And I can't have a son and yet you've told me that I will have a son which by all human accounts is impossible.'

And yet by every indication Abraham doesn't seem to accept it as suffering; but rather an opportunity to trust that God is Sovereign and in total control and loving Abraham in the midst of what many would accept as pure unadulterated suffering.

Faith looks beyond what it sees in the natural world and accepts the bigger picture, which God is painting with His love and mercy and grace, so that we may fit into that picture which always has the Son in it. Not a star called the sun, but the Son of God who desires to shine on us and through us.

Let's go back to our verse. "We also rejoice in our sufferings". Two words here we need to look at. The first is "rejoice" as we have it in the NIV. The Greek word for rejoice is *kauchaoma* and it means much more than to simply rejoice.

In fact, A.T Robertson in his book "Word Pictures in the N.T. says that the better translation is to glory or to exult in. The KJV uses the word glory while the NAS uses exult.

He goes on to say, that the idea of exulting in, or glorying in sufferings is to "hold up the "ideal" for the Christian after, and because of, his being set right with God. It is one thing to submit to or endure tribulations without complaint, but it is another to find ground of glorying in the midst of them as Paul exhorts here."

And therein lies somewhat of a mystery for a lot of people at varying degrees of maturity with the Lord. Many "young" believers encounter these sufferings and wonder at the rhyme and reason for them. Many "older" Christians encounter these sufferings and also wonder at the rhyme and reason for them.

One all too common reaction to sufferings is to become indignant towards God. Yet another, and what may appear to be a somewhat more noble reaction, is to grit your teeth and bear it all. Some will, in much frustration, try and analyze every detail of suffering and try to arrive at a logical conclusion.

I say frustrating because if we think we can fully comprehend the purpose of an infinite God with finite minds we'll end up like Job trying to arrive at a logical conclusion to events which make no sense.

Job was shown to be a man who loved the Lord. We're not told that he had sinned and therefore was on the receiving end of God's discipline. On the contrary he was viewed, even by Satan, as a man who should be thoroughly tested to see if his love for the Lord was real if trials in life came upon him.

God allowed the trials and they were very hard.

Three of Job's friends were trying to convince Job that they had arrived at the only logical conclusion for all of his troubles and that it lay at Job's feet of clay. Somehow, they assumed, he must have sinned heinously against the Lord. It's the only logical conclusion any thinking person could arrive at.

Job was tempted to accept this advice and he began to feel sorry for himself and then to question God. And here's what God said to Job.

Job 38:1-3 "Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm. He said: 2 "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? 3 Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me."

And then God spends the next two chapters questioning Job and asking such questions as these.

Job 38:4 "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand."

Job 38:12-13 "Have you ever given orders to the morning, or shown the dawn its place, 13 that it might take the earth by the edges and shake the wicked out of it?"

Job 38:34-35 "Can you raise your voice to the clouds and cover yourself with a flood of water? 35 Do you send the lightning bolts on their way? Do they report to you, 'Here we are'?"

These are all rhetorical questions which are not designed to simply get in Job's face, but more important to show us that when we're inclined to concentrate on self when troubles arise, God reminds us that the One to look to is the One who laid the earth's foundation, who can give orders to the morning and it obeys. The One who can raise His voice and the rains comply; the lightning stands at attention when God desires for it to be used to bring the rain.

It's all a matter of perspective. And the perspective God wants us to have is that He is Almighty and nothing escapes His notice, especially the people He loved and came to give His life for.

Often, our reaction to tribulation is closer to the reaction of Job to his friends where he was tempted to doubt God's goodness and love, and then we go off wondering if God really is able, or even willing to come to our rescue.

But, you see the issue isn't the tribulation but our reaction to it. This is why Paul records this for us here in our text. He says to glory or exult in sufferings in the same way we are to exult in the hope of the glory of God, as we see in verse 2 of our text.

Now, there's the tendency to look at this and throw up our hands in disbelief at such a notion and say, 'Well, if this is what God expects of me, He just better get used to the idea that I'm not cut out for this kind of an attitude towards suffering.'

But you know, in a sense that's exactly the point. None of us welcome sufferings in the sense that if given the choice between living life on an even keel, and living life in turmoil we would welcome the turmoil.

But what we're told in the scriptures is that while we may be in the world we are not of the world, if we are in Christ. This is to imply that our home is not ultimately in this world, but in the next with our Creator.

What Paul is saying is that when sufferings arise we can view them with earthly eyes or spiritual eyes and either see the problem with a temporal view or with an eternal view as God sees them, and then rejoice in what He is trying to accomplish in our lives.

Now, I told you that there was a second word I wanted us to look at. It's the word "sufferings". This word in the Greek is *thlipsis* and it means a number of similar things from affliction and anguish to distress and persecution. One commentator translates it pressure.

That may be more of an interpretation than a translation but I think it fits well with what God tells us time and again about how such afflictions are to be used in our lives.

One of the most beautiful and precious stones in the world is the diamond. And it's precisely because of pressure which allows carbon, which is comparatively worthless, to form into the stone we know as a diamond.

But, taken from the ground, a diamond is hardly the beautiful gem we know in the jewelry store. After years of pressure it must then be dug up from the dirt and then cut and ground until the facets sparkle and shine and we can stand in awe of such beauty. The result doesn't come cheap.

If it came cheap it would have no value. Likewise, if grace were cheap, it would have no value. If living unto the honor and glory of God came cheap it would have no value. If salvation came cheap it would have no value.

The fact is salvation came at a great cost. It cost the Son of Man His life, not to mention that He humbled Himself to become a man and live among sinful men, though sinless Himself. But, He did it for you and me.

In fact the writer of Hebrews puts it this way.....

Heb 12:2 "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

The joy set before Him was you and me. We are God's joy and He has loved us enough to give everything, even His only begotten Son. Grace isn't cheap. Our salvation isn't cheap, even though for us it is free as we accept by faith.

If it cost our Lord everything, shouldn't we consider the cost of what it is to accept that salvation by faith and to accept the means by which we may honor God in that salvation and grow in His grace?

Jesus speaks of how we are to view sufferings and tribulations in the Sermon on the Mount in Mat 5:11-12 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great

is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Or when James writes in Jam 1:2 "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,..."

What are they saying? The same thing Paul says. "We also exult in our tribulations." There is a reason for such trials. And it has to do with the cost of following Jesus. But we don't view such tribulations as simply gritting our teeth and bearing it.

With God all things have a purpose. He makes no mistakes. I was listening to a radio teacher this last Friday and he quoted a little girl who was asked by a teacher what she thought about God. She pondered a moment and said, "God is One who never has to say, Oops!"

That little girl had more of a Theological understanding of God than many of us at times. God is One who never has to say Oops! And yet sometimes when certain things happen in our lives we come to God and we act as though He's made a mistake.

But what does God say? He tells us in His word that He works ALL things for our good to we who love God and are called according to HIS PURPOSE."

There's the tendency to think that sufferings and tribulations are purposeless. And yet it's precisely because of the purpose that we can rejoice in trials or glory in tribulations. If there were no purpose designed by God then rejoicing in such things would be ludicrous.

Steven J. Lawson in his book, "When all hell breaks loose" say's, "Life is full of suffering. Our response to suffering is an accurate barometer of our soul. Tragedy is a universal traveler, calling upon both the Christian and non-Christian.....

.... Suffering is a part of the sovereign will of God and heaven is often silent [in the midst of that suffering]. In such times, the only answer God gives is a deeper revelation of Himself. We learn that He is the answer we seek. God never disclosed His secret counsel to Job, but He did reveal His character."

Lawson then gives a familiar analogy of how suffering is much like a tapestry. On the one side we see a mixture of different colored threads which seem to have no apparent pattern, and

instead look like a confused conglomeration of string going in many different directions.

But you turn the tapestry over and there is a beautiful pattern with all of the qualities of a master designer with its rich colors all coming together to form a masterpiece.

The point he makes is that in this life we often only see the underside of the tapestry and think that that's the picture or pattern intended by God, when in fact the Lord sees the real picture and desires for us to trust that He is the Master Designer weaving a master piece in our lives.

But, God desires that we be patient and live by faith that He is the One who has laid the foundations of the universe and will often use suffering in our lives to bring glory to Himself to demonstrate His purpose.

This is what Lawson sums up when he says that "True comfort comes not in seeing the other side of the tapestry, but in seeing the One who designs and weaves the tapestry. True comfort comes in knowing God. True comfort comes not in knowing why. True comfort comes in knowing who. It comes in knowing God. In trusting God. In worshipping God. When our world falls unexplainably, we must not dwell upon why, but upon who."

This is not to suggest that God will always leave us in the dark in such matters but it does mean that when there are no explanations we don't have to wonder at the goodness of God, but trust that He is fully aware of everything and is actively working all things out to His honor and glory and accomplishing in our lives what He knows to be best.

One of the things that is best is what we see at the end of verse 3 through verse 5..... 3 "because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 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." (Rom.5:4-5)

I want to take a few minutes to look at these characteristics which God is forming in us on a daily basis. William Barclay does an excellent job of explaining these. "Suffering produces perseverance."

Barclay says that the word perseverance in the Greek means much more than endurance. "It means the spirit which can overcome the

world; it means the spirit which does not passively endure but which actively overcomes the trials and tribulations of life."

He relays a story where someone once said to a gallant soul who was undergoing a great sorrow: "Sorrow fairly colors life, doesn't it? Back came the reply: "Yes! And I propose to choose the color." That is the perseverance Paul speaks of as we seek God who enables us to go through.

"Perseverance produces character". "The word Paul uses for character in the Greek is *dokime*. *Dokime* is used of metal which has been passed through the fire so that everything base has been purged out of it. It is used of coinage as we use the word sterling. When affliction is met with perseverance [from God] out of the battle a man emerges stronger, and purer, and better, and nearer God."

But, character, Paul goes on to say, "produces hope". As we said last week, hope is that which is based on faith. Not faith in faith, but faith in God. "Faith is the assurance or the substance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (Heb.11:1)

Well, what do we hope for? The same thing Abraham hoped for.

Hebrews 11:9-10 ⁹ By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign *land*, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; ¹⁰ for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

The hope we have may be embraced by faith but it's based on the substance of what God promises us in Christ; an eternal inheritance that will ultimately be expressed in the new heavens and new earth with Christ Himself dwelling among us forever.

The reason we are told by God to trust and hope in Him through the trials of life, is to mold us in such a way as to bear witness to the fact that God is bigger than any problem we have and to show the world that He is our hope.

It takes the emphasis off of the trial and places it upon the One in whom we hope and who has promised that He will never leave us or forsake us.

That cannot be demonstrated when we're having a pity-party or becoming anxious about life to the degree that we prove by our behavior that God is obviously not enough for us.

Is God enough for us, even in the midst of trials? Paul says, 'don't get hung up on the trials.' He doesn't mean to imply that we ignore the trials, or pretend that they don't exist or that we can't seek comfort during the trials, but he wants us to always go back to God and trust that He will not fail us and will actually use the trial in such a way as to make us stronger.

And in that sense we must rejoice because it is God who is personally using it to conform us into the image of Christ. And if God is personally involved to the extent that He is the One who is trying to bring about a particular result then, like James says, 'we can consider it all joy when we encounter various trials knowing that the testing of our faith produces endurance.'

Endurance for what reason? Endurance to be the kind of soldier of Christ who will be equipped to go into battle with the confidence which will see the battle through. The kind of confidence that can comfort others who are too weak to see the rhyme and reason of the battle and can help point them back to the God who loves us.

Barclay says, "When a man's hope is in God, it cannot turn to dust and ashes. When a man's hope is in God it cannot be disappointed. When a man's hope is in the love of God, it can never be an illusion, for God loves us with an everlasting love backed by an everlasting power."

That's why Paul can say in verse 5 "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."

We're not in the battle alone. We have each other. But, infinitely more than that God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. He has given His Spirit for our comfort, for our strength, for the endurance we need and to always keep our eyes on Jesus who is the author and perfecter of our faith.

The battles will always be with us because Satan will see to that. Tribulations and suffering will always be with us because it's the result of a sin-filled world.

But never lose sight of the fact that what the enemy may use to hurt us, or the trials in this life that seem to be there for no other reason than to bury us, God uses all these things to work together for our good and to bring us through unto His honor and glory.

In the O.T. Joseph's brothers delivered Joseph over to slave traders because they wanted him destroyed. Years later when they finally

met Joseph in Egypt, where he is now Pharaoh's right hand man, Joseph confronted them and said what you did to me you meant for evil, but God meant it for good.

Don't lose hope. Let me end with the Psalmist's words who knew what it was to have trials and tribulations but who also knew where his hope lay.

Psa 62:5-8 "Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. 6 He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. 7 My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. 8 Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge." Selah