

The Fourth Gift: Rejoicing over Trials
Romans 5:3-4

March 8, 2009

^{5:3} And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; ^{5:4} and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope;’ (NAS)

A. Introduction – what do most people think about ‘joy in suffering’?

B. ‘And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations ...’

1. how can this possibly be?

2. the story of Robert Reed

3. suffering has a purpose ¹

4. suffering purifies God’s people ²

5. suffering certifies and promotes the gospel message ³

¹ Revelation 3:19, Hebrews 12:6, Romans 8:28

² Job 23:10, Hebrews 12:11, Matthew 13:21

³ Acts 4:29, 5:41-42 (for the full story, read both chapters)

C. ‘... knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance ...’

1. ‘knowing that’ – Paul’s experience ⁴

2. ‘tribulation brings about perseverance’

3. is this a natural or normal effect of tribulation? ⁵

D. ‘... and perseverance, proven character’

1. it effects, brings about ‘proven character’ or ‘experience’

2. the story of Job ⁶

3. Ben Patterson’s two examples

E. ‘... and proven character, hope;’

1. this brings us full circle (back to hope)

2. this hope is a little different ⁷

F. Application

1. How do I deal with trials and tribulation?

2. Have I taken God and His purposes into account in my life?

3. Have I submitted to Him in this as in all things?

⁴ 2 Corinthians 1:6, 4:8, 11:24-33, 12:10

⁵ Luke 21:26

⁶ Job 1:9, 2:4-5, 42:7-9

⁷ 2 Corinthians 3:18

A. Introduction

1. Joy in Suffering? This is a gift?

- a. that is an idea at which the world shakes its head
- b. muttering under its breath about masochism
- c. that anyone should get pleasure out of suffering
- d. what foolishness and what insanity, they think;
- e. and yet, that is what our text, written by Paul, a very sane and sensible man, has to tell us today:

2. Romans: 5:3 And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; 5:4 and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope;

- a. today we are yanked back from the alpine heights of 'the hope of the glory of God' in which we exulted last week
- b. to find that we can find joy, exult in the valley of trials
- c. now, as we said last week, we will defer looking at joy, at exultation until the final series message, 'Joy in God'

B. 'And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations ...'

1. how can this possibly be?

- a. exult is to find joy, to rejoice; yes, even to boast
- b. that word tribulations – trials, sufferings – is literally to suffer those things that press upon us, that exert pressure on us, that oppress us – not just physical duress, but mental and spiritual pain; with stress as well as sickness
- c. yet in the midst of this affliction which is laid as a weight upon our physical and spiritual frame, we can find joy
- d. to find joy in tribulations – we ask why? ... and how?
- e. yet, when examined in the light of Scripture we find this truth not to be absurd, but spiritually logical

2. Robert Reed's—{2}.

- a. hands are twisted and his feet are useless. He can't bathe himself. ... feed himself. ... brush his teeth, comb his hair, or put on his underwear. Strips of Velcro hold his shirts together. His speech drags like a worn out audiocassette.
- b. Robert has cerebral palsy.
- c. The disease keeps him from driving a car, riding a bike, and going for a walk. But it didn't keep him from graduating from high school or attending Abilene Christian University, from which he graduated with a degree in Latin. Having cerebral palsy didn't keep him from teaching at St. Louis Junior College or from venturing overseas on five mission trips.
- d. Robert's disease didn't prevent him from being a missionary in Portugal. He moved to Lisbon, alone, in 1972, rented a hotel room and began studying Portuguese. He found a restaurant owner who would feed him after the rush hour and a tutor who would instruct him in the language. Then he stationed himself daily in a park, where he distributed brochures about Christ. Within six years he led seventy people to the Lord, one of whom became his wife, Rosa.
- e. Max Lucado relates hearing Robert speak. Men carried him in his wheelchair onto the platform; they laid a Bible in his lap; his stiff fingers forced open the pages. Lucado watched people in the audience wipe away tears of admiration from their faces. Robert could have asked for sympathy or pity, but he did just the opposite. He held his bent hand up in the air and boasted, 'I have everything I need for joy.'
- f. His shirts are held together by Velcro, but his life is held together by joy.

3. Suffering has a Purpose

- a. it is not at the whim of some capricious higher being
- b. but by the loving wisdom of our sovereign God
 - (A) 'Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.' (Revelation 3:19)
 - (B) '... whom the Lord loves he disciplines ...' (Heb. 12:6)
- c. now, this does not mean that suffering hurts any less
 - (A) but it presents a new perspective by which to view it
 - (B) we can see that our joy is independent of events
 - (C) and we can perceive that it is God's way of building us up for heaven – as the chorus we sometimes sing:

He's still working on me

to make me what I ought to be;

It took Him just a week to make the moon and stars,

the sun and the earth and Jupiter and Mars;

How loving and patient He must be!

He's still working on me!⁻⁽³⁾.

(D) as Calvin said, it is 'not that {Christians} seek such trials, but that they see God's goodness in allowing them.'⁻⁽⁴⁾.

(E) when, by faith, we can bring God into view, then we find that suffering is no longer meaningless, but part of the purpose of God; a fulfilment of Romans 8:28 – 'And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.'

d. here are some truths for us to consider about tribulations

(A) suffering purifies God's people

(B) suffering certifies and promotes the Gospel message

4. Suffering purifies God's people

a. we have already touched on that by quoting the verses of how God disciplines those whom He loves

b. Job could say with full assurance while in the furnace of affliction, 'But He {God} knows the way I take; When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.' (Job 23:10)

c. the author of Hebrews has the same message: 'All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.' (Hebrews 12:11)

d. the word tribulation itself is from the Latin tribulatio which was the threshing instrument that farmers used to separate the chaff from the grain. A Latin Christian writer used it to describe the distress that is God's means to separate the wheat from the chaff; the real from the pretenders to the faith; the mere professors from the possessors.

e. Lord Jesus said this would be the case in the parable of the soils: 'yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away.' (Matthew 13:21)

f. suffering purifies the people of God; the hymn expresses it,

“When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
The rivers of woe shall not thee overflow;
For I will be with thee thy troubles to bless,
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.
When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace, all-sufficient, shall be thy supply;
The flame shall not hurt thee – I only design
Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine.” –(5).

5. Suffering certifies and promotes the Gospel message

a. in Acts 4, the rulers threatened the apostles against further speaking in the name of Jesus: their prayer response was: ‘And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence,’ or, boldness (Acts 4:29). They continued to preach and were once again brought before the Jewish rulers who flogged them. What did the apostles do? ‘So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.’ (Acts 5:41-42)

b. ‘the church is built by the blood of the martyrs’

c. in the persecution that followed Stephen’s martyrdom, Christians were driven far and wide, and, at the same time, they bore the gospel message where it had not yet been

d. In Foxe’s Book of Martyrs we read of men such as Latimer and Ridley, who were burned at the stake, when Latimer said, ‘Be of good comfort, master Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle, by God’s grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out.’

e. in the lands of the persecuted church it is estimated that the year 2000 saw ½ million Christian martyrs,

f. some of the greatest gains of the gospel are taking place today through the persecuted church in such lands

6. now let us look at the purpose as found in the rest of our text

a. which gives a chain of reasons, consisting of three links

- b. tribulation effects patience or perseverance in our lives
- c. perseverance, in turn, effects a proven character in us
- d. and, a proven character, effects a new hope within us

C. **'... knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; ...'**

1. **'knowing that'** – what Paul is telling us, he knows by experience

- a. it wasn't theoretical nor philosophical knowledge
- b. 2 Corinthians refers throughout to the hardships that Paul faced in his service to the Lord – let me highlight a few
 - (A) 2 Corinthians 1:6 – **'But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation;'**
 - (B) **'we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing'** 2 Corinthians 4:8
 - (C) **'5 times I received 39 lashes ... once stoned ... 3 times shipwrecked ... 24 hours in the sea ... dangers from rivers, robbers, countrymen, Gentiles '** (chapter 11)
 - (D) **'Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.'** (2 Corinthians 12:10)
- c. since this book of Romans was written later than that letter to the church of Corinth, Paul knows what he is talking about out of personal experience when he says,

2. **'tribulation brings about perseverance'**

- a. the first link in this chain of sanctification of the Christian and the strengthening of God's people, is perseverance
- b. that word **'perseverance,'** also translated **'patience'** or **'endurance,'** is formed of 2 words, **'remain'** & **'underneath'**
 - (A) the idea not passive, it is not merely sitting underneath
 - (B) it means continuing in your course in spite of difficulty or opposition; choosing to remain underneath the load
 - (C) it is deliberate, thoughtful, bearing up under pressure
 - (D) it has more bravery and effort than English **'patience'**
- c. **The Caribbean pine is a hardy, tall, beautiful tree, able to withstand fierce hurricanes, long periods of drought, and even fire. But it cannot stand cultivation. In a well kept yard with beautiful lawn around,**

it dies.—^{6}.

d. the Christian is often the same way; God uses the pressure of trials to build spiritual muscle for spiritual warfare

3. is this the natural or normal effect of tribulation?

a. is this what daily persecution, stress, affliction, pressure does to the man and the woman outside of Jesus Christ?

b. the sale of tranquilizers, anti-depressants, and many drugs; the practice of psychiatry, psychology, and counselling tells us otherwise – tribulation does not bring patience to non-believers – and, sadly, not to some Christians

c. what are the non-joyful responses to tribulation?—^{7}.

(A) there is the Epicurean response: go bury yourself in the seeking of pleasure that it may outweigh the affliction which is a normal part of life;

(B) there is the Stoic response: grin and bear it; keep a stiff upper lip; be master of your fate

(C) and there is the more general response: people living lives of quiet desperation; in the words of Jesus, '[... men's hearts failing them for fear ...](#)' (AV) or '[men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world](#)' (Luke 21:26)

(D) these are the normal human responses to trials; but...

d. Christians should see God's hand in tribulation, effecting patience, perseverance in themselves, to enhance the strength of the church, to build up their character

e. so then, this effect, must be a work of the Holy Spirit and this perseverance implies the submission to God's will

f. so thus we are brought now to the next link in the chain

D. '[... and perseverance, proven character; ...](#)'

1. it effects, brings about '[proven character](#)' or, '[experience](#)'

a. this word first means trial or testing – appropriate to the context here of tribulation or suffering

b. it also means evidence or proof

c. and it combines these two ideas combined, describing a person who has been tested, has passed the test, and thus has furnished evidence of his or her character

- d. so it is translated 'approbation,' 'approval' or 'experience'
- e. but in all cases it means having come through affliction: having been tested; having experienced trial; having been proven by these things and passed the test
- f. trials give approval of our relationship to our Father God

2. is this not the story of Job?

- a. Satan slandered Job before God saying: 'Does Job fear God for nothing?' (Job 1:9) and, 'Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. However, put forth Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse You to Your face.' (Job 2:4-5)
- b. and God responded, in effect: 'Do your worst, Satan.'
- c. so, at the end, what is God's final assessment as spoken to Eliphaz? 'My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has.' (Job 42:7); it's repeated in verse 8
- d. and we read that 'the Lord accepted Job' (Job 42:9)

3. Ben Patterson in 'The Grand Essentials' writes: ^{8}.

- a. that when age whittles us down, what is left is our essence and on this subject he cites two personal examples
- b. a distant uncle who spent his life making money, and, in his dotage, drooled and babbled constantly about how much;
- c. and his wife's grandmother – equally senile – yet when the time came for a meal, would take the hands of those beside her, smile a beatific smile, look through tear-filled eyes, turn her dim eyes heavenward, and pour out love to her Saviour
- d. a proven character by a lifetime of experience with God

E. '... and proven character, hope ...'

1. we have return full circle

- a. last week we came to hope because at the return of Jesus Christ we shall see him as He is and we shall be like Him
- b. our hope in the glory of God; of our glorification with Him

- c. and this is a hope which is fuelled by what we know of the future as contained in the promises of God
2. but the hope in this verse is a little different
- a. it is that hope which is born in us as we see the Holy Spirit carrying out His stated work as the Spirit of Holiness
 - b. that is the work of sanctification of which we read in 2 Corinthians 3: 18, 'But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.'
 - c. this isn't 'pie in the sky bye and bye' – it's here now, now for our present tribulation, trials, stress and distress – the hope that is there for us for today's need and tomorrow's
 - d. as the hymn writer wrote: ^{-(9)}}
 - Just when I need Him, Jesus is near,
 - Just when I falter, just when I fear;
 - Ready to help me, ready to cheer,
 - Just when I need Him most.

F. Conclusion

- 1. It is a rare person who is not facing some trial at any time
 - a. and, if so, it is not a state that lasts for very long
 - b. so how are you facing testing when it comes?
 - c. is it as those who are without Christ: in the seeking of pleasure to forget it? ... in putting on a brave front? ... in the depths of despair?
 - d. or is it that in Christ you can see that God has a purpose
- 2. in whatever circumstance you may be this morning, will you not submit yourself to Him and His will as we sing our closing hymn, 'Am I a Soldier of the Cross?'

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ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version
ERV	The Revised Version of 1885
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NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
NLT	1996 New Living Translation © 1996 by Tyndale Charitable Trust
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
PHIL	New Testament Translation © 1972 by J. B. Phillips
RSV	Revised Standard Version © 1946, 1952 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

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2. “Everything I Need for Joy” by Max Lucado, from www.sermoncentral.com – Kerux illustration #12492
3. Joel Hemphill © 1930, Hemphill Music Co., Nashville
4. In Calvin’s Commentaries, Romans 5:3-4
5. How Firm a Foundation – “K” in Rippon’s Selection of Hymns, John Rippon (1751-1836)

6. "A Pine Not to Pamper" by C. F. Bundy from an old devotional calendar.
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