

**Romans:
Justification by Faith Means the Ability
to Rejoice in Suffering**

Romans 5:3-5

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January 14, 2001

If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Romans, chapter 5 as we continue through this great book together. In Romans, chapter 1 and 2, Paul explains to us what our predicament is. What the big problem is. In Romans, chapter 3, he tells us the glorious news of what God has done to resolve our predicament. He gives His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and He also announces to us in Romans 3 that if we will but trust on Him, if we will trust on Christ alone, as He has offered in the gospel for our salvation, we will find that we are justified by faith. That is, we are counted, we are declared to be righteous by faith. Not on account of our deeds, not on account of our inherent righteousness, but on account of Christ's righteousness. In Romans, chapter 4, Paul defends that teaching from the Old Testament, his bible, the bible of his day. So, as to show that this is not some new teaching that he has invented overnight, it's rooted in the revelation that God had given to his people over the last 2,000 years. In fact, he takes them right back 2,000 years to the life of Abraham. And in that life as Moses records it in Genesis 15 and 17, and he explains justification by faith; not only from Abraham, but also from David in Psalm 32. And so shows that this teaching on justification is one that is found in the Old Testament. Then, in Romans, chapter 5 he begins to talk about the consequences, or the implications of justification. Last week, we saw one of those implications in Romans 5, verses 1 and 2. We have peace with God. God has put things right through His Son, and we have received the benefits of what His Son has done simply by embracing Him by faith, by believing what He says about Himself, by believing what the gospel says about Him, and by trusting in Him personally, we have received those great benefits. He continues talking in that same line today because we really cut Paul off at mid-sentence. For Paul in verses 1 and 2 is actually carrying on a line of thought that continues several verses to go. So, let's hear God's holy word here in Romans 5, beginning in verse 3:

"And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance, and perseverance, proven character and proven character hope. And hope does not disappoint because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

Amen, and thus ends this reading of God's holy and inspired word. May He write His eternal truth upon our hearts. Let's pray.

Father we do bow before You, and we ask that You would open our eyes to behold wonderful things from Your word. By Your spirit we ask that you would enable us to understand, to believe and to live these things that You have set out. We pray as well for those who know not Jesus Christ or are skeptical of Him or of His promises, that they, too, would see the benefits of His work; and they would be made to believe, drawn to Him by the Spirit. These things we ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

Have you ever had anyone say to you, "You Christians just believe in pie in the sky, bye and bye." You know you are facing a trial and you express Your trust in God in the midst of that trial and somebody just sort of shakes their head. "You're living in a dream world, not facing reality. You just believe in pie in the sky, bye and bye." Maybe somebody has said to you, "Christianity is just a psychological crutch for people who can't face reality. They have to deal with hard things, loss of friends, loved ones, children, husbands, wives; difficulties without number. And the way they deal with it is just through living in a fantasyland. They just don't face up to it. They deal with it by denial. Why, even that famed well-respected intellectual and politician, Jessie "the body" Ventura has recently told us that we Christians are weak-minded people. We can't quite cope with the difficulties of reality, and so we resort to religion. Religion is that crutch that kind of gets us through.

Well, it may bring some comfort to you to know that some of the apostle Paul's opponents thought that about his teaching, and especially about the teaching that he had just given in verses 1 and 2 of Romans, chapter 5. After all, he had said in that passage that we as Christians exult in the glory of God. Speaking of that glory to come, we rejoice in it, we boast in it, we exult in it, and these opponents sort of look around at this motley ravel of Christians. They are peripheral, they are marginal. They have been kicked out of the Jewish community. They are despised in the Greco-Roman community. Most of them are not wealthy, most of them aren't from the acceptable social classes and here Paul is telling them that here they exult in the glory to come, and these opponents of Paul sort of shake their heads. Isn't it sad that Paul has to encourage those people to go to the rubble of life that they are experiencing now by giving them some flimsy hope in "pie in the sky, bye and bye." Some exulting in glory in the future. The apostle Paul is not finished though. It's easy to see, though, how a belief that God, through his grace, has put things right with us. It's easy to see how that would lead to great confidence about the future. It's easy to see how we can exalt in the glory to come. If we've been put right with God, and we fear no condemnation at the last day, it's no wonder that you can rejoice about what's to come. It's no wonder that you can rejoice about the final day.

As Jim Phillip observes, "The believer, Paul means, rejoices in the glad assurance that he shall have a part and a place in God's everlasting kingdom of glory." But to that literally glorious thought, Paul joins another. And that thought is this. We not only rejoice and boast and exult in the glory of God, we rejoice and boast and exult in suffering. We rejoice and boast and exult in tribulation. You say, "Paul, you've lost your mind. What do you mean. What are you talking about? How?" Well, let me explain by showing you four things that Paul tells us in these three little verses. First, look with me at verse 3, in the very first section of that verse.

I. Our free justification enables us to rejoice in present suffering.

Paul here is talking about the present benefits and realities of justification. He had just been talking about the glory to come, and the hope now of that glory to come, of that future glory. Now, however, he talks about a present rejoicing. A rejoicing in present circumstances. And he relates it to justification. In fact, he says that Christians boast in tribulation and suffering and not nearly in the glory to come precisely because of their justification. Because we have been justified, because we've been put right with God by God through Jesus Christ. Because He has declared us to be righteous, we boast in tribulation, he says. In other words, our free justification enables us to rejoice in our present sufferings. Some of the Jews that Paul was writing to and who were opposing his ministry, some of those Jews boasted in the law. The thing that gave them distinctiveness, the thing that set them apart from the Gentiles and everybody else in the world was that they had received the law of God from the mouth of God and through his prophet Moses at Sinai. They, among all the nations have been given that privilege to receive the law. It set them apart and they exalted in it, they gloried in it that they were the nation that had received God's law. Some of them gloried in the fact that they different from everyone else because they kept God's ceremonial law. They were circumcised. They kept the food laws. There were some things that the Gentiles ate that they didn't eat because they thought they were unclean. They were unrighteous, so they exulted, they boasted in their own obedience and righteousness to God's law. Paul, in Romans 5, 1 and 2 counters that boasting by saying, "Well let me tell you what we Christians boast in. You boast in the law. We boast in the glory to come. You boast in the law, we boast because we have peace with God.

Now He rocks them with another thing. He says furthermore I'll tell you another thing that we boast in that's better than what you boast in. We boast in our sufferings, and again His opponents are left scratching their heads because Paul is not running from reality at all. He's saying, "Look at it, right now. Look at that suffering. Look at the child that we've lost. Look at the family I've lost. Look at the spouse that I've lost. Look at the job I've lost. Pick any tribulation you want in my life. Here's what I want to tell you. I rejoice in the tribulation. I exult in it. I boast in it. And Paul introduces it in a way that we are familiar to in advertisements.

You've seen the advertisements. They tell you about what they're going to sell you and they say, "But, wait, there's more." And Paul starts this verse out that way. Look at the beginning of verse 3. "And not this only." But wait there's more. We not only boast in exulting the glory to come, we boast and exult in our sufferings, and you're not waiting for that. That's wasn't part of the package that you wanted, but Paul's going to tell you how, and you're still asking how. Paul says, "I want you to know that we glory in our tribulations." He doesn't say that we glory in spite of them. He doesn't say that we rejoice and exult even in the midst of them. He says we exult in them because of them.

What's he talking about? Tribulations, of course, for Paul means anything that we suffer for the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself in Matthew 5, verse 11 says, "Blest are you when men revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil things about you for my sake." Paul's, of course, is talking about those kinds of tribulation. Any tribulation endured for Christ, the apostle is saying, he rejoices in. But you know Paul and the rest of the New Testament use that term 'tribulation' in a far broader sense.

Paul knows that anything that we experience in a fallen world by the way of trial and tribulation that is the result of the presence of sin now in the created order because of the fall of Adam falls into the category of tribulation and of blessed tribulation. In other words, he is saying there is no tribulation which you as believers have endured, which you cannot rejoice in. We exult in our tribulations, he says. We are enabled to rejoice in this present suffering because by justification God is for us and therefore nothing can be against us as the apostle is going to say in Romans, chapter 8.

How is it that you can rejoice in tribulation? The only way that you can rejoice in any and every tribulation is to know that in every tribulation you are seeing not a picture of God against you, but you are seeing a picture of God for you. For the unbeliever, he may well feel that the trials and tribulations of life are the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. For the believer, you may look at the traumas and the difficulties of life and the trial of life and say, "You know, this universe makes no sense. I loved that woman, and You took her away from me by cancer. I loved that job, and I was wrongfully taken from it. I loved my child. I devoted myself to my child, and that child has been taken from me." And the young believer feels outraged and quondary and a feeling that the universe just doesn't make sense.

The apostle Paul says, trial and tribulation is not that way for the believer. Why? Because nothing in the universe is against him. And think of it, if God is for you, who can be against you. And even that in the universe which is warped by sin, God in His fatherly wisdom is ordering for your good. Paul is saying that we are able to rejoice in present suffering because nothing in this universe is against us.

Again, Jim Phillips says that this means that though grace, or through grace, evil

has lost the initiative in the believer's life and can no longer lord it over him. On the contrary, it becomes an instrument in God's hands of furthering His purposes in your life. It may be chastening, fatherly discipline. It is not for your destruction. It is not for His amusement. He does not take your suffering lightly. But it is for His fatherly discipline and correction. It may be for your character. He desires to build you up for some great battle ahead or to glorify Himself and to help His people and perhaps to help you and your family in some way that you would never ever fathom through helping you through a particular trial. But in all of it, He has the design of your good. And we need to remember this as we ponder the example of our own Savior in His approach to His own sufferings. In Hebrews 12:2 we are told that He endured the cross for the glory set before Him despising the shame. Think of it friends. Paul makes it clear and so does the book of Revelation, that in the new heavens and the new earth, in our ascended state, when we are with God forever in the great day, even our human bodies, our ascended human bodies, will be transformed and perfected. All the infirmities that we have dealt with throughout our life will be taken away. Even our bodies, even the bodily aspect of our being, will be perfected. All the pains and difficulties that we have endured in this life, perhaps diseases, will be taken away. If we've dealt with blindness, we'll have sight. If we've dealt with deafness and dumbness, we'll be able to speak and hear. Every bodily infirmity will have been remedied. And, in fact, our glorified will have to pass these that our human bodies, even in a perfect state, had never had before.

But you know it's also interesting that the gospels and the book of Revelation and Paul make it clear that Jesus continues to bear the marks of His crucifixion even in His ascended state. When the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ appeared to Thomas, his disciple, Thomas had the ability to put his finger into the wounds of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the book of Revelation makes it clear that He, the Lamb of God, bears those wounds for eternity.

Now I want you to think about something for a moment. The present and permanent scars of Jesus Christ in His ascended body not only show His love for you. Think of it. Your body perfected. For eternity His body bears the marks to remind you of His love. But not only that, my friends, because He glories in His suffering. He exults in His suffering. He doesn't try to forget it. He glories in it for His people.

Now to you unbelievers who are hear today. Let me ask you a question. Don't you wish that you could look at your trials and tribulations in that way? Don't you wish that you could have that kind of triumph before cancer, before the death of a child, before the loss of a spouse, before the wreck of your career, before the loss of everything? Don't you wish you could have that kind of confidence, that kind of assurance, that kind of joy?

A dear friend of mine in Scotland did a Ph.D. at the University of Glasgow, and a famous early church history professor who would invite him in from time to time

to speak with him. He was his supervisor. This gentleman was a great historian of the early church, but he was not an evangelical believer in the gospel. And he would sit Andrew down, and he would say, "Andy, tell me again, what is it that you believe." And Andy would spend twenty-five, thirty minutes just telling him what it was that he believed in. At the end of those conversations, and he would shake his head, and he would say, "Andrew, I wish that I could believe what you believe." Well, maybe you are sitting there an unbeliever today saying, "I just wish that I could believe that." And I want you to see that the greatest realist in the world, the apostle Paul, who experienced more present pain than you and I have ever experienced, could say, "I exult in my suffering." And the reason that he could say that was because he had been put right with God through Jesus Christ. He was a justified sinner, and he stood before God right with him, and he rejoiced in His sufferings. And then there's this.

II. Our free justification enables suffering to serve the interests of sanctification.

Paul is not finished. If you look at the end of verse 3 and on into verse 4, Paul now connects our tribulations with God teaching us and growing us up in sanctification. He tells us that because of justification by faith, there is a chain of hope from tribulation to perseverance, from perseverance to character, from character to hope. In other words, Paul says that our free justification, our having been declared right by God, enables our suffering to serve the interests of sanctification. Nothing in our experience, no tribulation is designed for our destruction as believers. But every tribulation is designed for our growth, for our sanctification, for our maturity. Tribulation under God's gospel providence is now bent to serve the purposes of His sanctification in our hearts, producing the endurance of faith.

Notice how Paul says it. He says, "Tribulation brings about perseverance." He doesn't mean this in some sort of a generic confidence man management sort of way. Well, you know, the hard times make the good times. That's not what Paul is saying. Let me tell you, you and I know people who have gone through hard times, and it's made them bitter, shriveled, little people. It hasn't produced good times. It has produced bitter, mean-spirited, hateful, broken people. Paul's not saying, "Show me a hard time, and I'll show you growth." Paul is saying, "For the believer, God's specific purpose in every trial is not to destroy you, but to build you up. And therefore you glory in that trial." Paul says that tribulation, plus God's gospel providence, produces endurance. It produces perseverance, and that tribulation, plus God's gospel providence, plus grace induced, grace empowered endurance produces character. And character is the result of, the product of, the proof of grace in our lives. And that gospel providence with tribulation, with perseverance, with character produces what? A sure and settled hope. Someone who had already tasted God's grace now doesn't wonder if he's going to taste God's grace then in the hope of glory. He's already experiencing God's grace in

his life now. Think of it my friends. Hebrews 5:8 says of Jesus, who was perfect, that although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. If that is true of Jesus, how much more is it true of us? We, who continue to have the remnants of sin in our hearts, how much more does God use the tribulations of life in order to promote our sanctification?

If we are justified by faith, Paul says, we have a new way of looking at trials in our lives. Have you ever paused, as a believer, in the midst of a trial and said, "Lord, thank You for this token that You are my Father and that you love me." Thank you God for breaking my heart so that I could again see that Your love is better than any love that can exist in this world. Thank you Father, for showing me again that You care so much for me that You will wean me away from the affections of the world to trust in and love You only. Turn with me in your hymnals to number 94. Hymn 94 is one that some of you probably have memorized, "How Firm a Foundation." Look at the fourth stanza of this great hymn. In that hymn we hear this. This is God speaking to His people, and we sing it as we say these words. "When through fiery trials your pathway shall lie, my grace all sufficient shall be your supply. The flame shall not hurt you; I only design your dross to consume and your gold to refine." My only purposes in this trial, my child, he says is to refine you in the image of My Son. We sing to the same effect.

Turn forward to hymn number 699. We're going to sing it in just a moment. Do you really believe what the third stanza of "Like a River Glorious" says? Every joy. Okay, I'm with you that far, or trial falls from above. Every trial, every trial? That's what Paul is saying. Every trial falls from above. That relationship with your husband that you've always wanted but have never gotten. The loss of that child that's ever with your heart. The loss of that brother, that sister. You've never been able to get it out of your mind. The loss of that mate of fifty years, who knew you better than you knew yourself. The experience that you have rejection because of your faith in Jesus Christ. Every trial comes from above? Yes, Paul is saying. And I don't just endure it, I exult in it. You wonder why we are so excited about justification? Well, that's why, because if I'm right with God, there is nothing else, nothing else that can rob the eternal joy that He has already set for me at His table. Let's come to His table in that light. Let's pray.

Oh Lord and our God, Your gospel is beyond that which we could ask or imagine. By Your grace bring us to the feast and enable us by faith to eat. We ask in Jesus name, Amen.

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