

“We Rejoice in Our Tribulations”
(Romans 5:3-5)

I. Introduction.

A. Review.

1. Paul told us that the blessed result of justification is peace with God.
 - a. We were at war with God and He with us.
 - b. We were born in sin, rebels against God; He, being just and holy, threatened His wrath.
 - c. But He reconciled us in His Son.
 - (i) Jesus removed the guilt of our crimes by suffering for them.
 - (ii) He removed our hatred for God by changing our hearts.
 - (iii) And He reconciled us both together in Himself.
 - (iv) More than bringing peace, He brought about our adoption as children.
2. This peace might really be seen as the foundation for all the other blessings.
 - a. Because we are at peace with God, we can rejoice in the expectation of glory.
 - b. Because we are at peace, we can rejoice in our tribulations.
 - c. Because when we were enemies He reconciled us, now being reconciled, the Lord will certainly save us.

B. This morning, we’re going to look at the second blessing: rejoicing in tribulation.

1. Tribulations are the unpleasant things we must face in life.
2. But Jesus has taken the sting out of them.
 - a. He promises that He will work even these things together for good.
 - b. Tribulation will work perseverance in us:
 - (i) Perseverance will show what we’re really like.
 - (ii) When we see ourselves persevering through hardship it will strengthen our hope.
 - (iii) It will show that God’s Spirit really is working His supernatural love in us.

II. Sermon.

A. Paul tells us this morning that we can rejoice in our tribulations. But I just want to remind you for a moment what tribulations are and that they are a part of the Christian life.

1. What are tribulations?
 - a. The word means “trouble, distress, hard circumstances, suffering” (USB Dictionary).
 - b. Friberg says that it refers to “suffering brought on by outward circumstances, affliction, oppression, trouble.”
 - c. Obviously, there are many things that can bring suffering.
 - (i) For the patriarchs in Canaan, famine brought it, such as the one that forced them to go to Egypt (Acts 7:11).
 - (ii) For the disciples, persecution brought suffering, such as that from Saul (Acts 11:19); or that which Paul faced from the Jews for preaching the Gospel (20:23).
 - (iii) For many widows and orphans, poverty brings suffering (James 1:27).
 - (iv) Many things can bring it today: sickness, loss of health with age, loss of employment, suffering persecution from unbelievers, or as Luther, even from those within the church.
2. But the Lord tells us not to be surprised by this suffering.
 - a. Contrary to the health and wealth movement that tells us God wills all should be well, Jesus said that tribulation would be a part of our lives.
 - b. He said to His disciples, “These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).
 - (i) What things did He speak? They would be cast out of synagogues, hated, hunted and killed by the Jews, and

this after Jesus was killed by them (John 16).

- (ii) He tells us that we can expect the same treatment from the world.
 - (a) He says, “If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (15:19).
 - (b) When you stand against the world, tell her that her works are evil, they will hate you, just as they did Jesus.
 - (c) John says, “Do not be surprised . . . if the world hates you (1 Jn. 3:13).
 - (d) We should be more surprised if they don’t; we should suspect that we’re not being salt and light (Matt. 5:13-16).

B. Now that’s the bad news, but there is good: We can rejoice in those tribulations.

- 1. We can rejoice because Jesus is working them together for good.
 - a. Paul writes, “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” (Rom. 8:28).
 - b. If we have trusted in Him, He will never allow anything to come between us, which is the greatest good: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, ‘For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:35-39).
- 2. The Lord actually uses tribulations to strengthen our confidence, our hope in this very thing. How does He do it?
 - a. First, He uses tribulations to bring about perseverance.
 - (i) Perseverance is endurance, patient endurance, steadfastness (USB Dictionary).
 - (ii) It develops when we are under constant pressure.
 - (iii) The roots of a tree grow deepest where the wind blows the strongest.
 - (iv) The wind is tribulation; God sends it to make us grow stronger.
 - b. Whether or not we persevere proves our character.
 - (i) Tribulations are trials; trials are tests: tests of character.
 - (ii) They are meant to show us what we are really like.
 - (iii) They show us, not only how strong we are, but whether or not we are really Christ’s.
 - (iv) Jesus said of the seed sown on rocky soil, “And the one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word, and immediately receives it with joy; 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” (Matt. 13:20-21).
 - (v) Those who fall entirely away under tribulation are still without Christ. *If that is the case with any of you here, you need to come to Christ for His grace.*
 - (vi) Those who are His will not fall fully away. Tribulation will actually strengthen them and make them able to endure even harder times.
 - c. But it can strengthen us in another way: it can create and strengthen our hope.
 - (i) When we see the power of Christ holding us up, it gives us hope.
 - (ii) If we already have hope, it makes it even stronger.
 - (iii) It shows us that our belief about our own spiritual condition is true.
 - (iv) It shows us that we really are going to inherit heaven.
 - d. In essence, it shows us that we really love the Lord.
 - (i) Why would we hold on to Christ when it means suffering, except that we love Him?

- (ii) When we persevere under affliction, it shows we have the Spirit's love: "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" (v. 5).
- (iii) Tribulation is not meant to weaken us, but strengthen us, our love for Christ, and thereby our hope of heaven.
- (iv) Remember what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt. 5:10-12).

III. Application: Consider how the Lord has used tribulation in your own lives.

A. I think we would all admit that we don't like to suffer.

1. We don't like pain.
2. We don't like to be disciplined.
3. We don't like going through hard times.
4. We don't like having our convictions tested down to the bottom of our hearts.
5. We don't like feeling weak and that we might fall away.

B. But I think we would also admit that each time we have been tested, the Lord has brought us through and we are better for it.

1. It's hard to see at the time; if you're still going through it, you might not be able to see it yet.
2. But you know it will come – not only through your experience, but through His Word.
3. God will refine the gold of your faith; He will remove its dross; and He will draw you closer through tribulation (1 Pet. 1:7).
4. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18, "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."
5. Let's learn then to see the gracious hand of our Lord behind our trials and tribulations and realize that He has a good purpose in them.
 - a. He is using them to cause us to grow in grace.
 - b. They will strengthen our assurance as we see His love at work in our hearts. Amen.