

Suffering and Glory

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[0 : 01] Let us pray. Father in heaven, we thank you for your gospel that is powerful to save us. We thank you that you surround our sufferings with your grace. We pray, Father, that we might understand that grace in a deep way as we hear your word this morning. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Well, we're looking at Romans chapter 5, verses 1 through 11. And we're taking a very short break from the series on the book of Acts that David has been preaching.

David's preaching next week. And the reason that this was chosen is because Paul talks about suffering. And suffering was the mark of the church in Acts.

It's the mark of the church today as well. One of the things that happened in the tsunami a little over a month ago in Asia is that many churches in India were actually swept away because it took place during Sunday services there.

[1 : 09] And so there were many churches that had a huge portion of their congregation gathered together as we are today and losing them in a moment. And many are grieving right now and dealing with suffering, the suffering that comes because of this broken world.

And we have suffering within our own church here at St. John's as well. Right now there are many people in our congregation who are suffering serious illness.

There are others who are experiencing things we don't know about. We don't often share with many people the very deep sorrows in our life. But we are all going through them from some time or another.

We are acquainted with suffering in our church. Some of us are suffering because of our stand for the gospel. Because we stand for Christ in our workplace or in our families or with friends.

And in the earliest church, suffering was also very prominent in the life of the church. It's a wonderful thing that the Bible doesn't shy away from talking about suffering in the church.

[2 : 14] All through the New Testament, you see this as a fact of their life together. And as we've been going through the book of Acts, we see the great leaders of the church killed in a senseless way.

People like Stephen. And in the last two chapters ago, we talked about James being killed. And then Peter being beaten up and jailed.

Many parishioners throughout the time that we've gone through Acts have been displaced from their homes. They've been persecuted by Saul himself until he was converted. And then Paul suffered a life of frequent hardship.

So Christians both then and now know suffering as a fact of their life together. And I think if you read the papers and if you think about human nature, the natural question to ask is, why do these things happen?

Why is there suffering when we have a God that is Lord, who is all-powerful? The early church must have asked that. Why couldn't Herod have died of those worms before he killed James?

[3 : 20] Why couldn't Saul have been converted before he threw all those people in prison and made people homeless and destroyed people's families? Well, we can't give a simple answer because we don't have the big picture.

We don't know. What we do know is that God blessed the church in that suffering. What they did know is that God gave grace through it all.

And this is a very important thing for us to understand. It's what comes through in Romans 5, 1 through 11. Paul surrounds his talk about suffering with talk about grace.

He has this understanding that suffering and grace go together. If you understand and grasp hold of the grace that has been given to us in Jesus Christ, if we live thankful lives for it, we go through

suffering, being able to withstand the battering that we take in the course of that suffering. In chapter 14, which David will preach on in a couple weeks, we find that this suffering and grace are a normal part of the Christian life. In Acts 14, 21 through 22, Paul and Barnabas are giving this pep talk.

[4 : 32] And they strengthen and encourage the Christians in Lystra and Iconium and Antioch. He tells them, reminds them about the grace that they have received as they receive the gospel.

But then he goes on to say this, and they give a quote from his sermon. He says, It is through many tribulations that we must enter the kingdom of God.

Well, what a curious way to have a pep talk. These guys would not be invited to be motivational speakers in most big churches today. But what they're saying is that we must remain true to the faith, and secondly, we must remain true to the faith because we know God is bringing us to heaven through our suffering.

They are saying it is normal part of the faithful, godly Christian life as they go to heaven. In fact, it is a sign that God is working in their life, that they would go through sufferings knowing the grace of God.

And that's what Romans 5 is teaching us, that God is bringing us to heaven through our suffering. In fact, it's saying that God surrounds our suffering and transforms it for his purposes.

[5 : 48] That's how powerful his gospel is. If you remember Psalm 139, there is this wonder that David speaks about, about God's power and knowledge.

He says to God, You hem me in, behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me.

It is high. I cannot attain it. Well, the truth is that God has laid his hand on you and me through Jesus Christ.

His grace is upon us. Jesus surrounds our life with all its suffering, and nothing can separate us from his love. And so he is Lord even of our sufferings, which he hems in and that he knows intimately.

That's why it's so crucial for us to know Jesus' words, that he said, Didn't you know that the Messiah had to suffer and die? Well, that's because he would be Lord of our sufferings and know them intimately.

[6 : 55] But as I said at the beginning, the natural question we ask when we face these sufferings is, Why? But you know, that question, why, is something we don't often ask of the grace that God has given to us in our lives.

I want you to look at verse 10. Verse 10 says that we are all enemies of God at one time. We have all been enemies of God.

So the question we should really ask, first of all, is, Why, in verse 1, did God give you and me faith in Jesus to save us? Why did he give us two incredible gifts of peace and friendship with God, as well as access to his grace in which we now stand?

Why do we know him as friend and as the one who saves us? We didn't deserve it. It was given while we were enemies of God. Why did God bless us in Christ Jesus with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places?

Well, that's a question that is deep for us. That is the real why. Charles Wesley expresses this very well in the hymn, And Can It Be?

[8 : 13] That hymn starts out with that question, Why did I receive grace? He says, And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Savior's blood?

Died he for me, who caused his pain? For me, who him to death pursued? How can it be, he's saying, why? And the answer is only this, Amazing love, How can it be that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

You see, he cannot fathom why God would do this for him. It is knowledge that is too deep and amazing for him. It is love that is amazing. And that's a good thing for us to ponder in our lives. To think with gratitude of the amazing gift that has been given to us in God's grace, That we do not deserve. Why would this happen to us? Well, Paul says the right response to this wonderful gift is simply to rejoice, Or literally to boast in three different things.

And I want you to notice he boasts about grace, and then suffering, and then grace. He starts out by saying, The gospel, he says to boast or rejoice in verse 2, In our hope of sharing the glory of God.

[9 : 32] Now, the gospel tells us that because of Jesus, We have this present and sure knowledge of the future. You see, we can only boast in this glory because we know for sure that it will happen.

And the gospel tells us that one day, We will see Jesus face to face, And we will be like him. In other words, we will share his divine nature.

We will share in it in some way. We will participate in it. C.S. Lewis wrote that one day, If you and I were to see each other in heaven, If we were to see it now, We would be very tempted to worship that creature.

It's kind of hard to imagine as we're looking at each other at the pews today. But we would be tempted to worship one another. If we were to see what God did to us in the resurrection of the dead.

How we will be changed and share in his glory. And so Paul's saying, Be proud of our creator and his purpose for humanity. And for his power to affect this purpose, This great purpose in each of our lives.

[10 : 42] Paul says in chapter 8, And this is a wonderful expression of glory and suffering together. He says, I consider that the sufferings of this present time Are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

For creation, all of it, waits with eager longing For the revealing of the sons of God. For that wonderful truth, that certainty, That will happen one day.

And I think it's very good for us To long for that day And to remember and contemplate How this glory far outweighs Even the deep suffering, The anguish and the pain or betrayal That you are experiencing in your life.

Any suffering that we go through, That glory will far outweigh it. And that's perhaps why Paul immediately follows The exalting, the boasting and sharing the glory of God By actually calling us to rejoice or boast in sufferings.

Verse 3. And that is a verse that as one commentator said, Paul is bringing us into deep, dark waters here. Because he knows, he's very well acquainted with suffering.

[12 : 01] He knows how deep and dark and painful suffering is. You can't help, as you read his letters, To see him go through every kind of emotional and physical suffering That people go through.

He is experiencing it in the strongest way. And yet he also knows God's grace. He is able to grasp hold of it. Well, Paul believes, And this is the truth that the Bible shows over and over again, That God is Lord of our suffering.

That's the only way he can boast in it. Is that God is actually doing something powerful through it By his gospel. He believes that suffering actually changes us And is moving us towards heaven.

The way he puts it in verse 3 is that Suffering produces endurance, Or perseverance, or patience. In other words, it's producing a steadfastness Of abiding in the trust of God.

It brings a very deep awareness In you and me That we are dependent upon God. I'm sure that you've noticed that In those times of suffering in your life, Whether it's now or at times in the past, You're deeply aware of your own vulnerability.

[13 : 18] You feel weak in a lot of ways. Vulnerable to the things that are around you. And God's grace is revealed at that time When we in our vulnerable state Turn to God as our refuge.

When we trust in him to say, You are doing something through my suffering. You are my only strength. And my only help. When we cry out for him to save us, The nature of our faith is being revealed.

That's why in the Psalms, When you see the psalmist talking About his relationship with God, He cries out to God for help And for deliverance and for strength. And that's what the gospel is all about.

It's saying that We are in deep need of Jesus Christ. We need to have an abiding trust in Jesus Who alone can save us. That he alone has what we cannot Give for ourselves.

If you've ever experienced times When you have known that your only hope Is God himself, And you remain steadfast in that faith, You can know that God Is powerfully working in you.

[14 : 28] It's God producing patience And endurance And abiding trust in him. Well, there's something that That endurance produces. The Bible says here in RSV That it produces character Or provedness, If that's an English word.

But Paul uses that metaphor, That provedness, And the idea of proving God That gold is pure In a refining fire. He is saying that When you go through suffering And your faith perseveres That test, There is a wonderful sense That your faith is real And strong And precious.

Just like fire reveals That the gold is pure And that it is the precious Real thing. It shows us, As we go through suffering, It shows us that Our faith is able to Withstand the challenges That come within our mind And from other people as well And from things that we read That God is absent In our suffering.

Where is your God? Why do you continue to trust God? Why is he letting you suffer? When you go through suffering And continue to trust in him, That faith will be Greatly strengthened.

And interestingly, That strong faith, That strengthening of faith That happens Is actually a sign That your faith is real. That God is actually Bringing you To the place one day Where you will know The glory of God.

[15:57] Where you will know His true healing And his true, And his resurrection. And that's why Paul then says That character Or provenness Produces hope.

So as God reveals The nature of our faith Which is dependence upon him And shows how strong And pure And long-lasting That faith is, You realize That grace Lies behind the curtain Of the visible world.

You realize That God in his power Is acting in the darkest Place of our life. And in fact, That grace is surrounding us In every situation Of our life. And I do know That that's not A natural process.

That's not something That comes easily to us In our human nature. To understand suffering In that way. We often think of suffering As something Of being forsaken. Of being pulled away From God.

But it is in the times Of suffering That we particularly know God and his goodness Towards us.

That's his gift to us. And I think of a person In our congregation Who, In whom God produced Endurance And character And hope In our in suffering.

[17:10] And that person Was Ted Robbins Who died Less than two weeks ago. He is somebody Who I have seen Was a living Illustration Of what it means To have Grace In the middle Of suffering.

To have God Change And make you Better Through suffering. Ted understood God's power Over it And his use of it In people's lives. And he wrote a letter To Catherine and I After our little Jordan died.

And that letter Was a real gift To us. Because Ted Had experienced A great deal Of grief In his life. There was three Members of his family That died In short order.

And he Shared in the letter The circumstances Of that suffering. And then he gave us Two assurances From his experience. And I want you to hear What those are.

He said first of all That God Our comforter Was present In every situation Of suffering That he knew As the God Of grace. And that in his grief Ted knew The love of God.

[18:18] He said that Dr. Packer Had written Whatever happens To us Has meaning Because it is Planned for us In love. And that God Would send people Into our lives A few people Who would be a source Of real blessing To us.

And those would be Often unexpected Contacts. And you know He was right. That did happen. We did see The love of God His purposes Played out.

And we did receive Love from many people Especially in the Congregation. And in fact Paul tells us In verse 5 Something like this. He says that The proof of God's Hope through suffering Is real.

It's the real Love of God Poured into our hearts Through the Holy Spirit Which has been Given to us. In other words We actually experience The love of God In our suffering By the power Of the Holy Spirit.

There's a real Experience of it In the middle Of our suffering. I think that Ted Was describing An aspect Of that love Being poured Into our hearts. The second assurance That he said Is that you will Be changed By the suffering.

[19:31] You will be changed. And the way You allow God To change you Will depend On you. Ideally He said What happens Is stated In 2 Corinthians 1 That we will Comfort others Because we have Been comforted By God And through the people That he has sent us.

Even within the church He said There are many Who need empathy And your experience Will be shared. And you will bless Those around you. And again This has proven To be true.

God has changed us Through suffering. God has made us More of what he Intends for us to be. In his power He has moved us Closer to heaven.
And you know These assurances Were a great help to us. But they were a help to us Only because God had produced Endurance Character And hope In Ted Through his suffering.
And it's only because Of that That he could write A letter like that. Throughout it Throughout the letter There was an absolute certainty In his mind That God Brings his grace Through suffering.
[20 : 42] And that's a person Who says it That did suffer. And I think that What this understanding Did for him And for us This understanding Of Romans 5 It actually makes you Want to desire God And his salvation All the more.

When you see God's love And his grace And his power And the way that he He has power Over suffering You want The unbroken fellowship With God And his final healing That is promised To us one day.

And that's why The passage Ends in verse 11 With the third call To rejoice Or boast. It says there That we also Rejoice in God Through Jesus Christ Through whom We have now received Our reconciliation.

You see We rejoice We boast In the hope Of sharing his glory. We boast In the sufferings Because God Is doing something Through it He is powerfully Working through it And there's grace Again We rejoice And boast In God We will see One day The God Who loves us The one Who is our refuge The one Who makes us Ready for heaven We will see him In that place.

You see God is revealed In his love As one Who is utterly And personally Committed to us Even in our sufferings. That's what we boast In him. He is committed To saving us And bringing us To heaven.

[22 : 11] And the proof of it Is in verses 6 Through 10. And I won't read All those verses It is showing to us The commitment of God To us Through his son Jesus Christ.

But he ends That section In verse 10 By saying While we were enemies We were reconciled To God Through the death Of his son. How much more now Shall we be saved By his life?

The logic of that sentence Is that If he was committed To us When we were enemies How much more Will he be committed To us Now that we are Friends with God Now that we have Peace with God Without a doubt He will give you life He will bring you To heaven Without a doubt He will give you The life that is Far beyond All you could ask Or imagine He is completely Committed To that mission In your life Jesus' death On the cross Is the guarantee Of that He did it While we were Still enemies And he will use Your sufferings To help you Bring you To his home And so I want To close by Actually Jesus' Example Of suffering Jesus is one Who comes As the suffering Messiah If we want To understand The way to go Through suffering We look to him The one Who gives us Faith The one Who shows us How to deal With the worst Suffering

That can happen In the world And it's actually From Hebrews 12 Chapter 2 And in Hebrews 12 2 We hear this Let us run With perseverance The race That is set Before us Looking to Jesus The pioneer The pioneer And perfecter Of our faith Who for the joy That was set Before him Endured the cross Despising its shame And is seated At the right hand At the throne Of God It is right for us To look at the joy That is set Before us The fact that God Has already Saved us And he is bringing us To that place Of joy At the right hand Of God May we Endure our sufferings Knowing that he Will accomplish His mission Of sharing In his glory
Amen