

From suffering to faith

Romans 5:3-5

*More than that, we rejoice in our **sufferings**, knowing that suffering produces **endurance**, 4 and endurance produces **character**, and character produces **hope**, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*

Romans 8:24-25

For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Hebrews 11:1

*Now **faith** is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*

Introduction:

This morning concludes our series on “Who are we when no one is looking?”

And this morning I would like to look at the area of our response to suffering and setbacks.

Henry Ford said:

Life is a series of experiences, each one of which makes us bigger, even though it is hard to realize this. For the world was built to develop character, and we must learn that the setbacks and grief's which we endure help us in our marching onward.

IN our modern western church we don't deal with these things rationally or biblically.

We tend to apply voodoo magic to it and somehow see that setbacks or struggles are the cause of an angry God, instead of the fuel for preparation for our future.

Myths and misconceptions:

I need to address a couple of issue before I am able to look at this topic in any real depth.

First of all we have what I believe started off as innocent misconceptions or lack of understandings in full gospel circles that have graduated and ended up as at best poor theology and at worst heresy, depending on how insistent you would like to be.

I was speaking to a gentleman this week, a business man who asked me for some time, some business coaching.

And he came and saw me in the church and we were talking and he made a declarative statements....it was more of an accusation...he asked, are you one of those health and wealth guys?

My reflection was...as opposed to what...one of those sickness and poverty guys?

One of those people who believe that you are only truly holy if you have nothing but doctor's bills and an inability to pay them?

You see, I know what he was saying...he did not.

Do I believe that God wants to prosper me? Yes.

But does that mean I will never have financial struggles or obstacles.....no.

Do I believe that God is able to heal the sick? Yes.

But does that mean I am in gross sin if I have either the flu or cancer...No.

The problem was that this gentleman's theological premise was based upon what he was against, not what he was for.

If you allow someone else to define your world for you, they will always make it to small.

If you take on another persons theology that is based upon there failure, you take on their failure.

In other words if I pray for a sick person and they do not recover – therefore I rational the thought that God doesn't heal any more.

If I pray a prayer and God doesn't answer it the way I want it, therefore I rational the thought that God doesn't answer prayers any more.

If I pray for prosperity and growth and all I seem to get is struggle and heartache, therefore I rational the thought that God isn't for me any more.

We are never to bring our theology down to the level of our experience, but push our experience up to the level of our theology.

I know that

- Bad things happen to good people
- Prayers don't seem to get answers
- And There are times when God seems far away

But I also know that my God is for me

AND IF my God is for me...then who can be against me?

So we need to deal with this area with sensitivity but also with scripture.

The church age we live in:

Most modern, so called faith filled or spirit filled churches are afraid to give answers or discuss these issues because they have no room in their theology for a doctrine of suffering.

They see every obstacle as a demon and all opposition as something trying to thwart the will of God.

I don't.

In fact, I thank God for the rejection, the accusations, the heartache and the obstacles that my very normal life as brought me.

A man is not made a man in an environment of luxury.

But only when his mental is tested.

The fires of adversity are the fires that refine a character and define a calling.

It is the potters wheel and the refiners fire that give a person the capacity to contain there future. They make us who we need to be in order to do that which we are called to do.

Jesus Himself would not have called us over comers if there were not things to overcome.

Revelation 3:21

"To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."

Romans 12:21

Do not be **overcome** by evil, but **overcome** evil with good.

1John 5:4

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has **overcome** the world--our faith.

To overcome means to have victory

To conquer

To beat

To win

Our Christian faith is not like a sports day at a liberal arts college where everyone is a winner no matter when you finish in the potato sack race

We are in the fight of our lives.

Our enemy is real and hates us.

But the prize...

The prize is worth it...

It is the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth in the hearts of men and women...it is the souls of mankind.

The outcome of the battle is assured, Christ has the victory.

But it is a real battle.

These daily skirmishes.

That have real casualties, and real obstacles.

Four Key thoughts:

There are four key thoughts I want you to take away from this morning it is this...

First, God wants to do a work in you in order to do a work through you.

Second, your suffering does not disqualify you from a miracle, it qualifies you for one.

Third, delay does not mean denial.

Finally, disaster does not mean you're a disappointment to God, just ready to graduate.

Let's start in Romans 5, then we will have time we will look at a story in 2 kings.

I have far too many notes.

I have done far too much studying

So I may just stop half way through and let you guess the rest, we will see.

The progression from suffering to a miracle:

So let's have a look at the verse we have here in Romans:

Romans 5:3-5

*3 More than that, we rejoice in our **sufferings**, knowing that suffering produces **endurance**, 4 and endurance produces **character**, and character produces **hope**, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*

Hebrews 11:1

*11:1 Now **faith** is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*

What we have here I believe is the progression.

An outline from a place of non optimal life or circumstance to a place of significant relationship with Christ.

Notice what I said

I said that we move from a situation of suffering to a situation of faith.
I didn't not say that you arrive at a place where there is never an obstacle.

Where there is never a challenge.

What I am saying is that this journey from suffering to overcoming does not necessarily give you a miracle, but makes you a miracle.

You not only receive an answer to prayer, you become the answer to prayer.

Most people confuse that.

What is more sustaining?

What has more long term benefits?

That God sends you a check every time you need it?

Or that God gives you the opportunity to start a business

Work longer and get a promotion?

Study and get a new job?

So that when someone else has a need you are now as the hands and feet of the body of Christ able to BE the miracle.

There are five terms here that I want to define for you:

Suffering

Endurance

Character

Hope

Faith

Suffering is defined as a state of physiological or physical distress.

It is a state when your life,
your health,
your marriage,
your job,
your emotions,
your finances are not what you believe are optimal

There are whole denominations build around the premise that God's people are blessed all the time.

Rich all the time.

Health all the time, have no struggles at any time.

Need never work again.

...friend, that place is called NIVANA and it is mythical.

It does not exist except in fairy tales and other make believe worlds like Christian Television.

Because this certainly is not a condition that the Bible outlines.

It was not the experience of the early church.

It was not the teaching of the Apostles or the early church fathers.

Endurance

We only develop endurance as a result of trials.
And endurance is the key to making advancements towards the end
Goal of faith.
You see faith is the aim of all of this, is the aim of this life.
Faith only can flow out of the process of sanctification.
It is the only way that we can please God.
As we grow to know Him and as we shall see, trust Him.
The trails are not the aim.

We don't rejoice in our trails, that is not what the scripture says....
We rejoice because of what trails produce.
We know that suffering produces endurance, endurance character,
character hope and faith grows out of our hope.
You see for us of like precious faith our trails do not prevent us from
the worshiping of God; they allow us to see God in the midst of our
calamity. The world does not understand that.

They think that whenever a Christian faces calamity it disproves our
God.
I say that my ability to grow and worship in spite of my calamity
proves my God, because that is supernatural.

Character:

Now this word character is translated in KJV as experience.
It means to be approved.

To have withstood trial and been proven.

It means that you have become a specimen of tried worth.

The faithful have come to rely on God.

They have come to draw upon Him and expect His intervention because they have experienced His deliverance previously.

There character is being developed in the fire of adversity and tempered through the process of endurance

Seneca said:

Fire is the test of Gold

Adversity of Strong men

Hope

Romans 8:24-25

For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Hope definition:

- a feeling that something desirable is likely to happen
- a chance that something desirable will happen or be possible
- a feeling of trust (archaic)

The word hope means to strongly wish for something

To have an earnest expectation.

Hope extends to things not yet obtained.

When ever something is readily seen or easily possessed, it is not hope.

Hope is laid up with God, beyond our reach.

Hope always draws on patience.

Hope needs endurance to propel itself forward.

Hope as it feed by endurance and grows into faith like a tree drawing what it needs from the ground to bear the fruit that it is destined to.

There seems to me to be two hopes here:

The first hope is hope in believing,
A hope which hangs direct on the testimony of God.

Then there is the second hope,
A hope is grounded on something different — not upon what the believer sees to be in the testimony of God, but upon what he discovers in themselves.

Now this second hope
It is the fruit not of faith, but of endurance; and is gathered not from the world that is without, but from the world that is within.
It is not a hope based solely on God's testimony about himself, but about our testimony about God's faithfulness to us over time.

Faith:

Faith grows out of hope.
Faith is the fruit of hope as it where.
Faith is the substance, the reality of the things we have hoped for
The things we have expected and dreamed of.
Lets look at a definition that we used on Wednesday night to describe faith.

Faith includes three aspects;

1. Knowledge of the truth
2. assent to the truth
3. trust in the truth

Faith is not merely an intellectual awareness of the truth, or even and intellectual acceptance of it.

You can have that and still not have faith

Faith is trusting in and believing in what you have come to have hope and believe in.

Faith is a trusting, a knowing that God is who He says He is and is able to do what He says He can do.

Now the pivotal issue...is character:

You will notice that on the way from suffering to faith you have to go through character.

Suffering is a state.

Faith is a state.

That is they are fixed point of beginning or end.

Character is the gate that you have to travel through in order to get from one state of being, one state of mind, to another.

How do you know that God is working in you and issue of Character?

Because you are experiencing endurance.

Endurance is a prerequisite of character development.

Hope is a prerequisite of faith development.

So you pass from a state suffering, through endurance to a work of character that results in a hope, that develops into faith.

Smith Wigglesworth, the man known as the Apostle of Faith put it like this:

'It is a blessed thing to learn that God's Word can never fail. Never listen to human plans. God can work mightily when you persist in believing Him in spite of discouragement from the human standpoint.'

The key is persisting.

Perseverance always outlasts persecution.

So how do you conduct yourself in times of adversity?

First of all don't PANIC.

Surround yourself with people who speak into your life.
They must be the sorts of people who will talk to you about your weakness, while believing in your strength.
Don't whine about your problem, speak to your problem
Pull a brains trust of people around you with a vested interest in your personal survival.
Now I didn't say the survival of your company-
But of you.
They love you.
They believe in you.
They want to see you make it.
They want to see your marriage stay together.
Your dream stay alive.

Second- Change your perspective:

We often desire to change, but rarely do unless it is absolutely necessary.
What you have now is not an obstacle, but an opportunity to grow
Don't allow yourself to be dissuaded or discouraged from a human standpoint, but see your life with eternal ramification and under a mightier hand than those of your temporal conditions
We forget so readily the last time God delivered us.
Count your blessing.
Go back over your life and build a written memorial to the faithfulness of God.
Remembering where you have come from gives you a glimpse of where you are going
When affliction comes to us, it should not make us sad, but sober.
All our heroes and heroines are not those that climb molehills, but mountains.
We rarely, if ever spend time reading books about people who did nothing with their life.

Third- PLAN:

When you hit a roadblock, make a detour.

Use the situation you are in as a fulcrum to rise above it

Tune out the negative voices and focus on the real world.

What you can do in this economy not what might happen in this economy.

What can we do in this situation?

Not what we can't do in this situation.

Look at the inventory of your life.

What relationship do you have to draw on?

What skills do you have that are not yet tapped?

We all have time, talent and treasure.

What do you have in abundance?

What is your greatest asset of those three?

Then leverage those to combat your current situation.

Fourth- Chart your PROGRESS:

This is vital.

Often when we are faced with adversity we go into fight mode.

And we get to round 14 and we think we have not made any progress.

But if we look back at our progress we can see how far we have come and we are reminded of the fact that we have only one more round to go.

If you find yourself in the gutter today that's ok.

Just concentrate on climbing the curb tomorrow and record your journey.

Because the facts are you will face obstacles in the future and the written record you have now in your hand is a testimony to God's ability and faithfulness.

Remember my comments about hope?

It is not a hope based solely on God's testimony about himself, but about our testimony about God's faithfulness to us over time.

Finally- PREPARE for the future:

Don't get your eyes of the prize friend, prepare for tomorrow.
You see I have faith for the breakthrough.

I am training leaders.
Preparing speeches.
Writing books.
Training myself as a pilot.
Preparing my body.

So that when that opportunity presents itself, I will knock it to the floor, skin it and have it mounted on the wall before someone else first shot is fired.

Why is that?

Because I have suffered longer, endured more,
I have trained my body and my mind
I am filled with hope...the kingdom...Gods dominion on the earth is forceful acquired and I am prepared to do my bit.

This is my time.

Life is a fight friend, get in the ring, tuck your chin and throw punches.

Let's have a look at some simple lessons from the life of Elijah:

1 Kings 17:1-16

Tells of the early life and the start of the development of Elijah the prophet.

At the beginning of this chapter Elijah is simply an unknown man, from an unknown town.

The town of Tishbite is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible outside of the context of it being the place where Elijah was from. He was no one from nowhere, but by the end of this period in his life, he is known as a man of God.

Background:

This is a time a desperate time for God's people.

There was terrible, despotic, demonic leadership in place and godlessness gripped the land.

The land needed a hero, a real prophet, a REAL man of God.

Elijah makes this pronouncement about rain... and it happens, rather it doesn't happen... there is no rain.

As the weeks went by, the story of Elijah's pronouncement of drought would have spread.

The affects would start to be seen.

There was no daily dew nor weekly showers. Remember this the most fertile part of the middle east. This was the location of the famed latter rain.

People would have come to talk of 'this real prophet'. This 'powerful man of God'.

If we were there in this desperate time, maybe we would have said – "This is what we need!! A real prophet"

If this were to happen today we would have put him on TV, got him a book deal to tell his story, publicized much of what he had down and said – but not God.

No God's ways are not our ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts. God knew that the immediate good could never be sacrificed for the long term gain.

He knew this was the start and not the end.

Elijah was consumed with dealing with Ahab, God saw down the tunnel of time and knew that Mt Carmel was coming.

This brings us to our first key thought of this morning....

1. God wants to do a work in you before he does a work through you

Before He can do a work through Elijah, he had to do a work in Elijah. He knew this man intimately – he knew he was nothing special, just a man like you and I (James 5:17).

He knew the plans that He had prepared for him and they were plans to prosper him and not to harm him, but to give him a future and a hope. In order to secure that future he had to prepare the man for one of the greatest showdowns between Good and evil in the Old Testament.

And in order to do that, the man needed to be prepared. In order to facilitate this inner growth, God took Elijah from a place of prominence – speaking in the court of the King. God took him from a place of prominence and renown. God took him from the platform that was brought about from his biggest miracle to date and called him out to a little insignificant brook, a stream; in the middle of nowhere. Because God knows that he has to do a work in us before He can do a work through us!

2. Suffering qualifies you for a miracle, it doesn't disqualify you

Trials and testing's last for a moment, but are designed to give us character for a life time.

AW Tozer said

"It is doubtful than God can bless a man greatly until he has hurt a man deeply."

The aim of isolation of Cherith, is the preparation for Carmel.
We are not God; we don't see the beginning from the end in our lives,
We relate obscurity to punishment,
God relates it to preparation, longevity and destiny.
It seems to be that the deeper the hurt, the greater the usefulness.
It is not in the pain, but our response to it and our refusal to become stiff necked and stubborn in the midst of it all that opens the doors of heaven and brings forth a blessing that can not be contained either in this world, or the one to come.
You see suffering is a place of the soul that you can only go to with God.

The trials, disappointments, unanswered prayers.
The death of a loved one
A divorce
A business failure
A health issue

Those things are things that dark spots on our soul that only time with God can erase. That can only be dealt with in our secret place.

FB meyer calls it; the value of a hidden life.
The value of a life that has learned to be hidden from man and has learnt to walk with God.
We must be willing to sit and listen in stillness for the voice of God.
To cut out the clutter and still ourselves to hear Him.

God could have been in the earthquake, the fire or the wind with this man.

But there was something in Elijah that need to hear the *'still small voice'*.

There was some part of him that need to learn to be still and know that He was God.

The ability to quiet your soul in the midst of the demands of life and family is a discipline of dependency on God.

When ever I find myself in a season of isolation or a sense of 'down times' I have come not to see this as a period of rejection, but as a period of preparation.

3. Delay does not mean denial

Matt 6:34 – Don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about it's own things

William Elliot in "For the living of these days" writes"

"The reason so many of you are overwrought, tense, distracter and anxious is that we never master the art of living one day at a time. Physically we do live a day at a time.... But mentally we live in all three tenses at once – yesterday, today, tomorrow - and that will not work!"

God never gave Elijah, the second step.

God never told him what was going to come after Cherith.

He told him to go to the brook, He never told him what would happen there, or what would happen latter.

He is merciful like that. He takes us step by step and teaches us to have the faith, perseverance and tenacity for today, because tomorrow brings it's own challenges.

Our prayers need not be directed or concerned with provision or concerned about how our future is going to workout...just praise over the fact that it will.

Elijah would sit by the brook everyday.

No food with him.

No money.

No freedom from God to go anywhere or do anything.

Wait.

Sit.

Every day birds bring bread and meat in the morning and in the evening and he drinks from the brook daily.

God was teaching him daily, hourly lessons of faith that were designed to last him a lifetime.

Every morning and every evening were training sessions for Elijah in the faithful provision of God.

The very use of ravens spoke daily to Elijah of God's ability to bend everything to His purpose.

Ravens were scavengers that were known for their greedy nature. Every day the will of God bent the nature of the birds to fulfill His command.

Every day as small specks on the horizon grew to a source of daily provision.

Twice a day Elijah was reminded of God's ability to make the possibility.

Twice a day, Elijah was reminded of the ability of God to provide and answer impossible prayers.

Twice a day Elijah called on the birds to bring his food in preparation for the day that he would call on God to deliver fire from the sky and consume an altar soaked with water.

God was doing a work in him so he could do a work that threw him!

4. Disaster does not mean you're a disappointment to God, just ready to graduate

A dried up brook is often a sign of God's pleasure, not disappointment in our life.

One morning Elijah notices that the brook that God had called him to, the brook that God had promised to sustain him with was drying up.

Have you ever been there?

The very thing that God told you to do... doesn't work any more!

The very business, the very opportunity, the very job,

has become a desert not an oasis.

This is the irony of it all...Elijah's final disaster was the result of his own answered prayer.

We pray "God use me" and the brooks dry up.
We pray "God send me" and the brooks dry up.
We pray "God prosper me" and the brooks dry up.

The dried up brook was a sign of graduation not condemnation.
Right when he was healthy, wealthy and wise – Abraham was told to sacrifice his 30 year old son.
Right in the middle of Paul's first missionary journey, he was stoned and left for dead at Lystra.
Jesus was sinless and perfect, yet at the 'height' of His ministry was crucified and to all intense and purpose He died without seeing the very thing He was called to usher in... the church age.

But you never get a resurrection without a crucifixion.

The drying up of the brook was the signal that God was about to move Elijah into the final training period of his ministry, in preparation for one of the greatest battle sin the bible – the conflict at Carmel!!