

We're continuing our sermon series on Romans so of course we'll start with a passage in Peter...

1 Peter 4:12-13

*"Dear friends, don't be **surprised** at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something **strange** were happening to you. (13) Instead, be **very glad**--for these **trials** make you **partners** with Christ in his **suffering**, so that you will have the **wonderful joy** of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world."*

Paul is saying... Dear friends, don't be surprised or shocked that you are going through testing that is like walking through fire. Be glad for the chance to suffer as Christ suffered. It will prepare you for even greater happiness when he makes his glorious return.

Why are we surprised then? Why aren't we VERY GLAD? How do you respond to struggles? Do you think that God is not able, not interested...not good?

It's is as though we think life should be smooth sailing once we accept Christ... we're surprise by their intensity... the fierceness of them. We want them to make sense, we need to know there is purpose behind the struggle...

Here's the purpose... Everything we go through in life is for His glory... to make us like Jesus. Our Lord wants our faith to grow strong... He wants to produce holiness in our lives. **We are saved from the fire of punishment but not the fire of purification.** While struggles may surprise us, they do not define us.

Let's pray...

Romans 5:1-5

*"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (2) Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (3) **Not only that**, but 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."*

So, even in struggle... even in suffering, there is purpose... no matter how difficult... there is truth to learn and benefit from. Let's take these passages apart.

Verse 3 - Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,

NOT ONLY THAT... Paul is saying...wait there's more! The Greek word for **Rejoice** means... **to boast, speak loudly, to show joy**... this is a spiritual decision to worship! Recognizing what God has done and is doing in our lives. This is huge... worship enables our heart/mind/spirit to fix/focus itself on God not on our struggles.

Worship creates perspective... creates focus on God!

Psalm 57:7

"My heart is confident in you, O God; my heart is confident. No wonder I can sing your praises!"

When you focus on God... it's hard to focus on sufferings

Sufferings = Pressure, distress, oppression, persecution, trouble... it's a picture of being squeezed tightly. It is internal pressure that causes someone to feel confined, restricted, "without options" or "no way of escape."

Knowing = to see, turn my attention towards, perceive with my senses, experience it. God wants us to know that there is purpose in our struggle.

Produces = to work out, to fashion, to finish the job.

Suffering has a purpose... it produces endurance

Endurance = steadfastness, patience, perseverance, means abiding/living under the will of another.

Endurance is going through the fire of struggle/suffering/disappointment and standing by faith in the grace of God. You don't give up, you don't give in... you give yourself to Him. You abide under His will, His purpose for you. The fire tempers you... it changes you... it cleanses you and toughens your faith. Endurance has a forward look, the ability to focus on what is beyond the current struggle... and see the purpose of God in it.

Sometimes struggles are strongholds to break through... sometimes (perhaps often) struggles are strategies God uses to work through us.

Here's an example of what I mean... 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

*"So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, **a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me**, to keep me from becoming conceited. (8) Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. (9) But he said to me, '**My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.**' Therefore **I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.** (10) **For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**"*

I have read this account before and thought these thoughts....

Paul... you only asked three times... what about seeking, knocking...banging on the door? Paul, where's your faith?

Paul's thorn is probably the most famous afflictions in Bible history, and we don't even know what it was! Gives us an opportunity to identify with Paul... **His thorn isn't the point... the point is what God's purpose was for the thorn.**

Let's check this down

- A thorn was given (not what I prayed for, thank you very much)
- Messenger of Satan harasses me (not fun)
- To keep me humble (hmmm, I must need that)
- It's Painful (yes it is)
- I prayed for its removal (Yes I did)
- God did not remove it (nope)
- God said grace would be enough (but He did answer)
- Paul says... yep, it is! (Just what I needed)

It's clear from Scripture that God's purpose was to keep Paul humble and dependent on God's power. The funny thing is... Paul doesn't explain God's motivation any deeper. Paul knows that the most redemptive gift ever, the death of Christ the Lord, was given to us through the vilest plan ever devised. Paul recognizes God's strategy in his own struggle... God is after our heart.

What God is NOT saying... God is not telling Paul to "suck it up and put your big boy pants on" He also didn't tell Paul to stop praying!

He's telling Paul... no matter what you need to rely on me. **My grace is sufficient (means unfailing strength)** So Paul is able to embrace the purpose of the thorn and boast... **What the enemy meant for me to suffer through God meant for me to find strength through!**

We boast... we worship through the struggle, the things that are squeezing us... knowing it produces purpose in us, that it works purpose in us. Jesus said it this way... not my will, but yours be done!

In Hebrews (10:36) it says we have NEED of endurance! It's necessary... it's our duty... it's useful for us. We need endurance because what it produces in us.

Somebody find and read... 1 Peter 1:6-7... Romans 8:28

All things work together... even testing by fire!

Listen to Paul down the road a bit....

2 Timothy 3:10-11

"You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, (11) my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued (deliver from a fast current) me.

Grace was indeed sufficient...I wonder did God finally remove that thorn or did Paul find another meaning for the word rescue?