

# Rejoicing in Tribulations

📖 Romans 5:3-5

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We are studying Romans 3:21-5:21 and we have studied in detail the doctrine of justification in 3:21-4:25. Justification is tense 1 of salvation. Salvation has three tenses; the past tense, justification, the present tense, sanctification, and the future tense, glorification. In 3:21-5:21 Paul is majoring on the past tense, justification. He teaches that justification is a once for all declaration that occurs at the moment of faith and is totally apart from works. Luther said that we are at the same time just and a sinner and quipped that justification was saying that when we believe in Christ we are like a pile of dung that is covered with a fresh blanket of snow such that there was no inner transformation in justification, but rather a legal declaration of righteousness such that God both looks and treats us as if we are perfectly righteous. In 5:1ff Paul teaches this justification carries with it a number of attendant blessings. We are taught not to limit justification to the concept of a simple declaration but to connect with it a series of results. There are two types of results. Verses 1-8 explain the *present* results of justification and verses 9-11 explain the *future* results. The fact they are results is seen in that in verse 1 Paul says, "Therefore, having been justified." The "therefore" meaning that what follows are blessings that attend to or result from our justification. And while all believers have these things it is not true that we all know that we have these things and therefore we must learn them in order to appropriate them by faith throughout the Christian life and enjoy victory. So you see that Paul is already bleeding over into tense 2 of salvation, the present tense of sanctification, whereas up to 5:1 it has been all tense 1 of salvation, our justification. Sanctification is what God does inside of us, it is transformation, it is a process, it is a change in the inner person. It is the dung actually being changed into snow, it is a process. But what is important to distinguish is that before an internal change can begin He has to cover us with snow. So you see in Romans 5:1-11 a shift happening here from salvation in tense 1 to salvation in tense 2 but tense 1 is the basis for tense 2. In other words, you can never be sanctified without first having been justified.

Let's review some of the results of having been justified that we saw last week in 5:1. What's the first thing we have? The first is "peace with God." This peace is objective peace not subjective peace. It

means there is no longer any enmity between us and God. Since it is objective peace then it is the basis of subjective peace. We can feel at peace in difficult situations because we have peace with God. He is not against us, He is for us! The reason? We have been justified. Paul then states that this peace is mediated "through our Lord Jesus Christ." In all, point of fact, everything that we have is mediated through our Lord Jesus Christ and this passage plays up the centrality of Christ and His work on the cross. The cross work of Christ satisfied God entirely and so when we have faith and are placed in Christ we satisfy God entirely because we are in Him. In verse 2 we have the second result, "access to grace." This access is once for all granted at the moment of faith in Christ at tense 1 when we were justified and we can forevermore access this grace anytime we need it in order to be sanctified in tense 2 because justification is by grace and sanctification is by grace. The third result is also in verse 2, "standing in grace." Our standing in grace is our position; we have a position before God. We came to stand in grace and we remain standing in grace. This means we have eternal security because there is no possibility of losing our standing in grace. Once for all and forevermore we have a perfect standing in His grace. At the end of verse 2, the fourth result is "we exult in the hope of the glory of God." The word "hope" refers to something in the future that we "eagerly expect." The something that we eagerly expect is the glory of God which refers to the fullness of the glory of God when it is manifested in the millennial kingdom. Jesus Christ is the glory of God and so when He returns to earth to establish His kingdom our hope will no longer be hope for we will see Him as He is, we will be heirs of the world. This is a present hope because we have been justified.

Today we come to Romans 5:3-5 and the fifth result of justification, **and not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations**. In other words, not only do we exult in the present because of what is coming in the future, but we also exult in the present tribulations because we know they are necessary to prepare us for the future. The word **tribulations** is *θλιψεις* and means "trouble that inflicts distress." It can be translated, "oppressions, afflictions, tribulations." Wiersbe points out an interesting illustration. He says, "Our English word 'tribulation' comes from a Latin word *tribulum*. In Paul's day, a *tribulum* was a heavy piece of timber with spikes in it, used for threshing the grain. The *tribulum* was drawn over the grain and it separated the wheat from the chaff."<sup>1</sup> Have you ever felt like you were being run over by a *tribulum*? You're not alone. Now we should point out that the word tribulation occurs in two types of contexts; first global distress and second individual distress. The global distress is what we refer to as "the future tribulation." In the OT the most common term used to describe this period was the Day of the Lord. The same term is also used in the NT but less frequently. The day of the Lord is a special time of devastation ushering forth from God, the warrior-King, when He takes over the earth. This day is further specified in the OT passage of Daniel 9 as the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel, a period of seven years during which the anti-Christ will come and after which the kingdom will come. This seven years is said to be in particular for Daniel's people, the Jews and for Daniel's city, Jerusalem. Both the day of the Lord and the

70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel are characterized by God's wrath being poured out upon the world in order to judge the nations, bring the remnant of Israel to belief in the Messiahship of Jesus and judge the non-remnant; in short, to separate the wheat from the chaff. For an example of this usage turn back to Romans 2. We could go to other clearer passages but this one is nearby. In the context God's going to judge the unbelieving world whether Jew or Greek with His wrath, the day of the Lord judgments. Paul says in verse 5, "But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." The storing up points to the future day of the Lord. In verse 9 this day of wrath is described as "tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek." The Jew and Greek show it is a global tribulation. All in all it should be clear from this passage that at a future time God is going to send forth His tribulation wrath upon the whole world, whether Jew or Greek, because they have spurned His patience and kindness by not repenting. Is this the tribulation Paul is saying that believers exult in in 5:3? Certainly not. Obviously even here believers are not destined to enter this tribulation wrath as verse 7 teaches, but rather we are destined for eternal life, escaping the wrath to come. But this is one usage of **tribulation**, *θλιψις*, and it occurs in the context to a future wrath of God that will be poured out on the whole world and there are much better verses that show this such as Matt 24:21 and 29, et. al. but this one is near our context and sufficient to show the point.

The second type of context is individual distress context and this is uniquely for believers. What the tribulation does in this context is teach the believer how to live a life separate from the old nature and according to the new nature. This is the type of context we are studying in Rom 5:3. There is nothing in this context that indicates the tribulation is referring to a future period of global destructive judgments. Instead, it is referring to believers facing tribulations in order to learn to live according to the new nature and not the old nature. So the two types of contexts both point to a kind of separation but the kind of separation differs. In other words, believers do face tribulations, even Jesus said, "In the world you have tribulation, but take courage, I have overcome the world." But we do not face *the* tribulation, that terrible time coming upon the whole world. The Bible consistently teaches that we will not go through that tribulation (e.g. 1 Thess 1:10; 5:9-10; 2 Thess 2:1-12; Col 3:1-11; Rev 3:10 and many other passages). Even in Rom 5:9 we are taught this: Paul says, "much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him." In other words, because we have been justified at the moment of faith we shall be delivered from the future time of God's wrath. The reason is legal exclusively. It has nothing to do with our behavior. It has to do with a much bigger element stemming from our justified status before God. Therefore, if He were to put us in the future wrath of the Tribulation He would be breaking His own law and God would never do that. Christ died for us and much more than merely being declared justified Paul says we are exempt from the coming tribulation wrath. Of course, one argument people make is to make a distinction between man's wrath,

Satan's wrath and God's wrath and they try to isolate God's wrath to the end of the Tribulation and say that we can go through man's wrath and Satan's wrath, just not God's wrath, and by that they get the Church half way or three quarters way into the tribulation. However, this is a futile argument because you will never find the terms man's wrath and Satan's wrath in the Bible. Even the world at that time will recognize that what has come upon the earth up to the first six seals is the wrath of God and the Lamb and not mere human or Satanic wrath (cf Rev 6:17). Further, nothing in Rev 6 could be caused by Satan or man. Satan is powerful but he cannot cause a truly global war, he cannot cause a global famine, he cannot cause the death of over ¼ of the world's population and he cannot cause a global earthquake and a mass of meteors falling to the earth and every mountain and island on earth to move. The fact is that Rev 5 teaches that the only one who can break the seals of the scroll that contains all 21 judgments of the tribulation is the Lamb of God. Since He breaks the seal it is clear that all 21 judgments are His and the Father's wrath, not man or Satan - they are mere pawns. Further, there is no promise to protect the saints in that period of time after the Church is removed by rapture. Saints die in Rev 6, Rev 7, Rev 8, Rev 9, Rev 10, Rev 11, Rev 12, Rev 13, Rev 14, Rev 16, Rev 17 and Rev 18. If the Church is promised to be protected through the Tribulation as some suggest then God does a pretty sorry job of it. The fact is those dying are not church saints. They are not once called church saints. The last time the church is mentioned is Rev 3 and the next time you see the church is in Rev 19 returning with Christ as the bride. Where is the church in Rev 6-18? There is no reference. There are saints but we would call these tribulation saints because they came to faith after the rapture of the church and therefore believed during the tribulation period. So we as the Church can in no way enter the future tribulation of God's wrath. The reason here is stated to be our justified status before God. That is what Paul says in Rom 5:9. We can no more be put under the wrath of God as Jesus Christ can be put under the wrath of God. He is the husband and we are the bride. A husband would not put his bride through wrath. That would be abuse and Christ loves His bride, the Church. But we can and do now face difficulties of a different nature. These are on an entirely different scale altogether, they are not geophysical but mental, emotional, physical and intellectual difficulties that we must face in order to be prepared for the kingdom to come.

How are we to respond to these tribulations? Verse 3, by exulting. The Greek word *καυχασθαι* is the same Greek word used in verse 2 of "exulting in hope of the glory of God". The word means "to boast, to brag," even "to glory" and thus the translation "to exult" which points to "extreme joyfulness," even "to leap for joy." How, you might ask, when I am facing afflictions can I leap for joy? Because verse 3, we **know** something. The Greek word for **know** is the perfect participle. It means we have "gained information" and because of this information we can leap for joy in our tribulations. What information have we gained? **that tribulation brings about perseverance, and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope.** The items in this chain are linked by cause-effect. Tribulation is the cause,

perseverance is the result, perseverance is the cause, proven character is the result, and proven character is the cause and hope is the result. We come full circle to the end of verse 2, exulting in the hope of the glory of God, looking to the future. So in a way what Paul is doing in 3-4 is backing up to explain how it is we have hope for the future, how it is that we eagerly expect the future manifestation of the glory of God in the millennial kingdom.

The critical verb is **brings about**. This Greek word is *κατεργαζομαι* and means "to cause a state or condition, *bring about, produce, create*." I would translate produce. The same exact verb is used in the James 1:3 progression during trials where James said "that the testing of your faith *produces* endurance" and in 2 Cor 4:17 where in the context of afflictions Paul said "momentary, light affliction is *producing* for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison." In all three cases something is being produced in us through the affliction. Wuest makes this important observation. "Paul did not exult because of the tribulations themselves but because of their beneficial effect upon his Christian life. This the saint must learn to do. He must look at these trials and difficulties as assets that develop his Christian character."<sup>2</sup> I'd further that by saying that God's character development program is designed specifically to prepare you for kingdom reign. And so I'm challenging you to think about your tribulations in that context, as blessings because they change your character in readiness for the kingdom. You see, the good character change that occurs, all that is going to last forever, it's going to stay with you, and it's only the bad things that will be wiped away at the resurrection. But the good things, they will remain. So the tribulations, when you handle them correctly, develop your Christian character. They are critical to your preparation for the future. You take them with you. You can't just get a resurrection body and be qualified to reign. You have to first be trained. Only when we know this can we exult in our tribulations. And when we know this we glory because we know our God is at work on our character, preparing us, sharpening us, honing us into the kingdom people He wants us to be.

Leaping for joy in tribulations, however, is not the normal response. The normal response is to feel sorry for yourself and have a big pity party. "To the unbeliever this life is all he has. He has no prospect of joy or happiness hereafter. He doesn't even know whether there is another life. If, in this life, his joy and happiness is marred by tribulation and affliction, he is miserable, because he has lost all he had."<sup>3</sup> But for us this life is not all we have. This life is just a blip on the radar. It's an important blip but a blip nonetheless. Ultimately we have the life to come and we are preparing for that life now. Every tribulation now is an opportunity to depend upon Christ and see our character developed in preparation for the kingdom. So we glory in our tribulations!

**Tribulations** we said are "difficulties" and contextually refer to difficulties related to Christ. We must go through these in order to be prepared for the kingdom. For example, turn to Acts 14:22 to see how Paul put it. The situation in verse 8 was they were at Lystra and there they healed a lame man authenticating

their apostleship and message. But you notice in verse 19 that some Jews had followed Paul and they won over the crowds so “they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.” At that point I think Satan thought he had gotten rid of Paul but verse 20, “But while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city.” So not only did get up but he went back into the city. “The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe” and they preached the gospel there and then look at the end of verse 21, “they returned to Lystra” the city in which he was stoned and left for dead, “and to Iconium and to Antioch,” and why did Paul return to these cities? You would think that he would stay away from Lystra for fear of his life. But he returned to “strengthen the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying” what, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.” You see that suffering precedes glory. What was the path that Jesus took? Jesus has two comings. How do we characterize the first coming? Suffering. How do we characterize the second coming? Glories. So the path that Jesus took was one of suffering through the cross prior to glory in the kingdom. We follow the same path. We must suffer tribulations before we can reign with Him in glory. It is the lot of all Christians to suffer some degree of tribulation prior to the coming kingdom when we will reign in glory. That’s what Paul is saying in 14:22. So if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ then deal with the fact that He has already prepared tribulations for you to go through. You can’t go around them; you can’t go over them, you can’t go under them, you must go through them. The only issue is how you go through them.

Now what do tribulations produce? First, they produce **perseverance**. There’s no other way to gain **perseverance** than to go through tribulations. The Greek word for **perseverance** is *υπομονη* and means “the capacity to hold out or bear up in the face of difficulty.” It’s a word that relates to pressure and bearing up under pressure. Thayer says, “the characteristic of a man who is unswerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and sufferings.” The way this works is that you bear up under a small load and become capable of bearing up under a larger load and so forth and so on. The verbal form is *hupomenō* ( *πομενω*), “to remain under,” thus, to remain under trials in a God-honoring way so as to learn the lesson they are sent to teach, rather than attempt to get out from under them in an effort to be relieved of their pressure.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, when you face trials you’re not trying to get out from under the pressure. That’s not what it’s about. That’s not the goal. The goal is to learn all you can from the pressure. You want to be looking for the lessons. And lest you think that you can avoid the pressures, the pressures are already scheduled for your life (Eph 2:10), so the point is to prepare now for the future pressures because if you don’t learn to bear up under the little pressures of life then when the greater pressures arrive you won’t be prepared to bear up the load and you’ll collapse, you’ll be destroyed, you’ll make a wreck of your Christian life. So the outlook is that the difficulties are opportunities to advance spiritually. If you look at them as “Did I do something wrong?” “Is God getting back at me?” you are missing the point entirely. That is actually very arrogant to ask. You

may reap what you sow but God is in the business of training His children to be prepared for the kingdom. He's not getting back at you. That is a very selfish thought. And it's a very little thought. God has scheduled trials for you to approve of you, to develop you, to teach you. So prepare now by learning how to deal with all the little pressures of life so that when the greater pressures come you are able to withstand.

What does perseverance produce in turn? Perseverance produces **proven character**. Note, not just character but **proven character**. The Greek word is *δοκιμη* and can refer either to "a testing process" or "the experience of going through a test with emphasis on the result." Here it is the latter. God puts you through a test in order to approve of you. He's not trying to cause you to fail the test. His interest is for you to pass the test. One who has **proven character** is one who has been put to the test and stood fast. This is the goal of the tribulation. That you would demonstrate a proven character. It's one thing to say you have character, it's another thing to prove it by passing a test. Clearly again you see we are into sanctification, tense 2 of salvation, and in tense 2 we are talking about growing to maturity, developing character, this is a change God brings to pass in you by sending you tribulations. This is all necessary to be ready for reigning in the kingdom.

What does proven character produce? **Hope**. **Hope** again, as in verse 2, is an eager expectation. We don't hope for what we already have, otherwise hope is no longer hope. This hope is the same hope referred to in verse 2. What hope was that? The hope of the future glory of God being revealed in the millennial kingdom, of sharing in His reign. Paul then in vv 3-4 is simply backing up and explaining how we arrive at the hope of the glory of God being revealed in the millennial kingdom. We arrive at that hope by facing present tribulations which produce perseverance which in turn produces proven character which assures us that God is preparing us for something greater, kingdom rule with Him.

And verse 5, **and hope does not disappoint**, that is, hope is not vain. **Disappointment** is the Greek word *καταισχυνω* and refers to "shame that results when our hope is shown to be vain." Have you ever expressed hope in something but it was shown to be a false hope? How did you feel? Embarrassed, ashamed and people ridiculed you because of it. But there is no reason to be embarrassed about our hope. The hope we have does not **disappoint**. Why? Because we have the internal witness of the Spirit. There is no other way to interpret this that I know of than an internal witness of the Spirit that gives us confidence in the future reality of the kingdom. The way Paul refers to this internal witness of the Spirit is to say, **because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us**. The Greek word for **poured out** is *εκχεω* and in the perfect tense it means has been poured out and is continuing to be poured out within us. It refers to what He does for us as we are facing the tribulations. It could even be translated flooded into us and still flooding our hearts.<sup>5</sup> **The love of God** has been and is continually flooding into our hearts as we face tribulations. Isn't it great to

have the reassuring love of God to spur us on, to encourage us? How is it being flooded into our hearts? **Through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.** This is the sixth result of justification. **The Holy Spirit was given to indwell us.** The indwelling of the Spirit refers to the Holy Spirit taking up residence in us. He is something of a down payment until we receive our resurrection bodies fit for the kingdom. All believers in the Church dispensation have the indwelling Spirit. If someone does not have the Spirit he does not belong to Him. Turn to Romans 8:9. Paul will expand upon this later. What we find in Romans 5 is in seed form to what Paul will expand upon in Romans 8. In 8:9 Paul says, "However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him." So if you do not have the indwelling Spirit in this age then you do not belong to God, you are not His child. But if you do you are His child and God pours out His love into your heart through the Holy Spirit who came to indwell you at the moment of faith in Christ and continues to pour out that love. So the Spirit's indwelling is permanent. When we sin He doesn't leave us or forsake us. This is how we can grieve the Spirit (Eph 4:30). We can grieve Him because when we sin He continues to indwell us. If He left when we sinned then we would not grieve Him. We would repulse Him but we would not grieve Him. So the fact that He indwells us is what paves the way for the possibility of us grieving Him. But since He permanently indwells us then we have another route at which we arrive at eternal security. Once justified always justified, once indwelt by the Spirit always indwelt by the Spirit, etc...

The overall point and summary of what Paul is teaching is that there is no reason to be disappointed when God sends us tribulations. Instead we leap for joy because we know that the tribulations are designed to produce perseverance and the perseverance in turn is designed to produce proven character and the proven character in turn is designed to produce hope that we are being prepared for something more, that our tribulations are not meaningless, that they are preparing us for the future millennial reign with Christ. This future hope does not disappoint because throughout the process of our tribulations God is constantly pouring out His love into our hearts by means of the Holy Spirit whom He has given to indwell us. This assures us that He is at work in our lives preparing us for the coming kingdom reign. Now you can see how we leap for joy.

In conclusion there is the parallel passage of James where he says about trials, "Count it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." Be encouraged in your trials. God is at work in you to make you into somebody. Right now you may be nobody. But God is in the business of making nobodies into somebodies. So leap for joy when the tribulations come. Don't pity yourself. Don't moan and groan. Exult! Glory! It means He is at work in you to do His good pleasure. And remember, James also said, "Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those



who love Him.” And those crowns we will cast at our Savior’s feet because we will know that it was His grace working in our lives that resulted in those crowns to begin with. So start thanking God for your tribulations today and give up having a pity party.

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ro 5:3.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest’s Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), Ro 5:3.

<sup>3</sup> McClain, p 126.

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest’s Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), Ro 5:3.

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest’s Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), Ro 5:3.