

**6/13/2021**

**Romans 5:1-5**

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

### **Perseverance**

Oh my, is this scripture a tough one to follow. Those verses are some of my favorite verses in scripture because they provide for me an anchor to hold onto when life gets hard...but when I truly read those verses I have to say that I'm convicted and challenged by them – especially that part about glorying in or rejoicing in our sufferings. I mean, really, Paul? Are you sure about that? It's those moments when I'm in the midst of suffering when it's hardest to rejoice – especially to rejoice in my suffering. So why does Paul tell us to do this? Was he crazy? Was he an idealist? Was he pretending?

We know that Paul suffered much in his Christian life. He was in and out of prison as he tried to spread the good news about Jesus Christ around the ancient Mediterranean world. And we also know that he had what he called a “thorn in his side” throughout his ministry that he understood as something that made him dependent on the strength of God

more than on his own strength. We don't exactly know what that "thorn in his side" was but I'm kind of glad we don't know – it allows us to identify with Paul's suffering in our own personal ways, I think.

Have you suffered? We haven't all suffered in the same ways as each other, but if you're a living, breathing human being, you have suffered at some point in your life and you will, to be sure, experience some sort of suffering in the years ahead.

What do you do in the midst of your suffering? For me, it's really easy for me to get down and depressed. When I'm in the midst of a struggle, it's hard for me to think that life will be any different than how it feels and seems in the middle of the trial. How do you react to suffering in your life?

I'd like to share with you a story about a little girl named Wilma. Wilma didn't get much of a head start in life. A bout with polio left her left leg crooked and her foot twisted inward so she had to wear leg braces. After seven years of painful therapy, she could walk without her braces. At age 12 Wilma tried out for a girls basketball team, but didn't make it. Determined, she practiced with a girlfriend and two boys every day. The next year she made the team. When a college track coach saw her during a game, he talked her into letting him train her as a runner. By age 14 she

had outrun the fastest sprinters in the U.S. In 1956 Wilma made the U.S. Olympic team, but showed poorly. That bitter disappointment motivated her to work harder for the 1960 Olympics in Rome--and there **Wilma Rudolph** won three gold medals, the most a woman had ever won.

Perseverance.

This word “perseverance” that shows up in our scripture reading today has a really cool meaning in Greek, which is the original language that Paul’s letter to the Romans was written in. “**Perseverance**” in Greek is “Hupomone” and it means to remain, to stand my ground, or to endure. Wilma remained in the struggle – she stood her ground in the fight with the effects of Polio on her body and she grew physically stronger and stronger instead of weaker.

This past Friday I was on a zoom call with two of my dear friends named Hayley and Taylor – they each work in ministry positions in Waco, TX and Selma, Alabama. We usually talk once a week about how life is going and how we can be praying for one another and we also like to share what God is teaching us through life and scripture. As we were discussing what the Lord is teaching us in scripture, my friend Hayley told us a little parable about one of her houseplants. Many years ago she bought a **fiddle**

**leaf fig plant** from Amazon that was just about a foot tall. She's nurtured it for many years now and **now it's taller than her**. But a part of the nurturing process, along with watering it and making sure it has some sunlight, is shaking it. She occasionally shakes her fiddle leaf fig plant. Does anyone know why? To make it stronger. My friend Hayley learned somewhere that it's suggested to occasionally give her fiddle leaf fig tree a gentle shake to imitate the wind in order for its roots to grow deeper and become stronger. The tree must learn to stand it's ground and endure disruptions in order to become stronger and grow taller and healthier.

Like the fiddle leaf fig tree, disruptions in our lives, struggles and trials that come our way, are opportunities for us sink our root, our faith, deeper into God and grow in our Christian maturity.

The last few weeks since Pentecost Sunday we have been talking about God's Holy Spirit. And today's scripture ends with an emphasis on the Holy Spirit. Remember that God's spirit is described many times in scripture with the Greek word "paraclete" which means "helper" "advocate" someone to come alongside and support. No matter how weary or frantic or weak you might feel, God's love has already been poured out for you on the cross and with God's Spirit.

Are you going through a struggle right now? Physical, emotional, mental, spiritual – or maybe all at the same time? Maybe your current struggle is an invitation from the Lord to grow and root yourself in Him even deeper.

Let's pray

Come forward after final hymn to receive strength needed to stand your ground and persevere through your trial.