

Lent 2

(The Blessing of spiritual growth in suffering) Rom 5

1 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 rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

3 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. 6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

3 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

Fawn is sitting at the coffee table drinking her coffee. Hamilton walks in, sees her, and joins her at the table.

HAMILTON: O, Hi Fawn.

FAWN: Hi Hamiton. . . Hamilton, why are you shaking your head?

HAMILTON I'm going to jail, Fawn.

FAWN: Jail, what did you do?

HAMILTON It's not what I did Fawn. I'm visiting a friend, actually a friend I didn't know was there.

FAWN: Who's that?

HAMILTON: You might know him, we went to high school with him . . . Jerry Taylor.

FAWN: I remember Jerry. Didn't he play baseball?

HAMILTON: He did. We were on the hockey team together too.

FAWN: Why is he in jail?

HAMILTON: I'm not totally sure. I just saw his mom at the store and said, 'Hi.' After I passed her she came and found me, and told me Jerry was in jail because of some drug mixup. She asked if I would visit him.

FAWN: Have you ever been in a jail before?

HAMILTON: No I haven't. I'm a little nervous. And, what do I say to Jerry?

FAWN: What did Jerry's mom say? Did she mention why she wanted *you* to visit him?

HAMILTON: Well, actually she remembered I brought Jerry to church once. She thought I might be able to help. But, I'm not a pastor. I'm not sure I want to quote Bible verses to him. I don't know what to say.

FAWN: I'm not sure you have to say anything, really. Maybe just visiting will say you care. Maybe you should just ask him how he's doing and listen.

HAMILTON: OK. Well, my coffee is done. See you later, Fawn.

As we watch the news recently we have been overwhelmed and even shocked by the stories and

pictures surrounding the earthquake in Japan. This quake was almost as powerful as the one that hit Alaska in 1964. But, Japan is much more populous than Alaska was at that time. So there are more injuries to people. Damage to buildings and roads and farms are more extreme, and there is even more damage in dollars. To add to this problem we are now seeing on-going trouble from damage to the nuclear reactors and power plants. A recent report said that exposure to radiation is hindering efforts to transport injured people to places where they can be cared for. Officials are saying this is the worst disaster faced by the country since World War II.

Why do these disasters happen? What good can come from them? Well, we are already learning amidst the tragedy of Japan, that good has come from previous earthquakes. Japan has learned from previous earthquakes so that they took precautions in building and preparation of citizens that saved the lives of people this time. So, previous trouble did lead to good at *this* time. I'm sure that there will be lessons from this quake that might help in the future, maybe especially in the area of atomic energy precautions.

When we face the trials and sufferings of life we can grow through our sufferings. Romans 5:3-5 says, **3 . . . we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.**

Sometimes the blessings from suffering might be lessons of how to do things, like with the earthquake. But, sometimes the lessons can teach us who we are and, even more importantly, who God is. Romans 5 tells us who we are. Romans 5:8 says, "while we were sinners." We are not God, We are sinful and fallible and weak. That is why Romans 5:1 says, "since we are justified by faith." We are justified by faith, because, in our sin, we are not able to do certain things. We aren't able to save ourselves. But, we have a God who does love us and gave His Son. **God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** We have a God who does justify us by his Grace, through faith. When we struggle because of our weakness, our sin, we have a Lord and God who loves us and a God we can count on.

You see, it is in time of trouble that we really know our weakness. It is in time of trouble that we really know the love and power and faithfulness of God. So, when trouble comes we can grow in perseverance, because God is faithful. We can grow in character, because we reflect God who is, righteous and loving. We can grow in hope, because our hope is not in our weakness, but in God.

As pastor I have often helped people through life's difficulties and troubles. More than once I have heard someone say, "I wouldn't have chosen to do it that way, but I really grew during that trial." Paul says we can rejoice in our sufferings. While, we may not always rejoice in sufferings, we can grow as we lean on God.

(Hamilton is sitting drinking his coffee. Fawn walks in, sees him, and joins him at the table.)

HAMILTON: O, Hi Fawn.

FAWN: Hi Hamilton. (Sitting down) Soooooooo . . . How did it go?

HAMILTON:How did what go?

FAWN: You know, Hamilton. How did your visit with Jerry go? What's it like to be in prison?

HAMILTON:Well, being in prison is different. You can't take a cell phone with you, or a leatherman. They check you out in a scanner like you're flying on a plane. And then doors lock behind you. It's sobering.

FAWN: I figured that. How's Jerry?

HAMILTON:That's the amazing thing. I guess Jerry was not only using drugs, but selling them some. And, he's been in jail for about 8 months now and has a way to go before he gets out. But, he said that being in jail was maybe the best thing that ever happened to him.

FAWN: (Surprised) Really???

HAMILTON:He says he's had time to think and realizes his errors. In addition, he said he remembered going to church with me, and has been going to worship and Bible Study in prison. I guess there are a lot of opportunities. In fact, he's been taking his study seriously. He started quoting Bible verses to me that I didn't know.

FAWN: Wow!

HAMILTON:Yeah. Jerry thanked me for caring enough to come visit. He says he's committed to staying clean when he gets out. He wants to come to church with me. He says this trouble has made him grow.

FAWN: Well, we did hear in church last night that we can grow through our sufferings.

HAMILTON:Jerry says the biggest growth is he realizes how much he needs Jesus, and how much Jesus loves Him.

FAWN: We could all use to grow in knowing those things. . . though I don't know that I want to go to jail to learn them.

HAMILTON: Well, Fawn. My coffee's done. I've got to get home. See you in church.