

Sonoraville Baptist Church
Sunday, May 15, 2011, 11:00 AM
Rev. Steve Skates, Pastor

Don't Waste Your Sorrows - Romans 5:3-4

Introduction: Some of you are going through some difficult times right now, struggling with suffering and pain and troubles. I want to encourage your heart today.

There are all kinds of pain out there - physical pain, emotional pain, mental pain and relational pain. They come in all shapes and sizes. None of us are immune to them.

Paul Billheimer wrote a book entitled "*Don't Waste Your Sorrows.*" The premise of the book is that if people don't learn something from the pain and disappointments of life, then they've wasted the experience. That's a Biblical precept that is shared in our text for this morning Let's read **Romans 5:3-4** and see what we have to gain from our struggle with sufferings.

If you're struggling with sorrows, you need to know that God does have a word about how you can rejoice in the midst of our troubles. But before we go there, we need to examine some of the reasons God even allows suffering. First:

1. Reasons for Suffering

A. Suffering Leads to a Dependence On God

When you are not going through any kind of struggle, and everything is okay, do you find yourself thinking, "*Life is good. I can handle this?*" And the next thing you know, you're not as faithful to the Lord in your Church attendance, your prayer life, or your Bible study. In other words, you've basically starting shutting God out of your life and you're not depending on Him. On the other hand, whenever you are going through a tough time in your life, isn't that when you start to think, "*Well, maybe I'm not as strong as I think I am. Perhaps I do need God after all?*"

Now let me pose a reason we tend to think that way. I've heard many people say during a time of crisis, "*The Bible says that God won't put more on you than you can bear.*" That sounds good. It sounds Biblical, and we wish it were true, but the truth is, it is just not in there!

Now there *is* a promise found in **1 Corinthians 10:13 (NIV)** that says, "*... God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.*" But that's talking about *temptations* not *trials*. This promise of God means that God doesn't allow a temptation to come your way that is so strong you cannot resist it. In fact, He even gives you a way of escape. But, remember, this is not referring to troubles or problems, it's referring to temptations.

The truth is, sometimes we have so many problems come our way, and so many trials and burdens can be piled upon us on us, that we really cannot bear them alone, and when they overwhelm us, it does drive us to God. But until they do, in our prideful humanity, we tend to falsely think we can handle anything.

Look at what the Apostle Paul said in **2 Corinthians 1:8-9 (NLT)**. Here is an expert on suffering, and he said, "*I think you ought to know, dear brothers and sisters, about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia. We were crushed and completely overwhelmed, and we thought we would never live through it. In fact, we expected to die.*" So, here is a vivid example that God does and will allow more on us than we can stand **by ourselves**. But, in vs. 9, he continues on and says, "*But as a result, we learned not to rely on ourselves, but on God who can raise the dead.*"

The truth is, God wants us to learn to depend totally and completely on Him – not just in the tough times, but in the good times as well. Secondly, God allows suffering because:

B. Suffering Shows Us the Value of God's Grace

We tend to think grace was just something we needed when we got saved, but we forget that God's grace is active right now.

Paul suffered with what he called "*a thorn in the flesh.*" We don't know what that was, but because we don't, we can apply it to whatever problem we're going through.

Think about a "*thorn in the flesh.*" Think about a "*splinter under your fingernail.*" Think about something that is causing you constant pain you are thinking about all the time. When you go to bed at night, you think about

it. When you wake up in the middle of the night, you think about it. And, when you get up the next morning, you realize it's still there. That's a *"thorn in the flesh."*

Let's see what Paul did about his *"thorn."* **Read 2 Cor. 12:8-9.** Now, we respond the same way when we go through trouble. Like the apostle Paul, we pray, *"Lord, take it away!" Please take it away!" "Oh Lord, please take it away!"* Sometimes, we wonder why He doesn't take it away. And the reason is He wants us to realize how valuable His grace and power is. That way, we don't depend upon ourselves. Thirdly, God allows suffering because:

C. Suffering Connects Us with the Sacrifice of Jesus

Jesus Christ suffered a lot didn't He? Just think about all the ways He suffered. He suffered rejection, loneliness, betrayal, and physical pain. All the kinds of suffering He experienced, we're going to experience. Paul writes in Phil. 3:10 (NIV): *"I want to know Christ."* I like that. *"and the power of His resurrection."* I like that. *"and the fellowship of His suffering."* I don't like that. *"Becoming like Him in His death"* I don't like that. Some folks think the Christian life is like ordering a hamburger at Burger King. *"I want a Whopper, but hold the onions and the lettuce."*

Some people say, *"I want the Christian life, I want forgiveness of sins, a home in Heaven, my name in the Lamb's Book of Life, but hold the suffering part. I'll pass on that."* No, friends. When you accept Jesus, you get the full meal deal. You connect His suffering with your suffering.

I've done some stupid things in my life and one of them was trying to use a weed eater while wearing short pants. One time, I was trimming next to a bush and I got the line hung up in a branch. Well, I jerked it to try to free it up, and that line spinning at a million miles an hour caught me on the shin. By the time I said the *"O"* in *"Ouch"* that string whipped my leg raw. But you should have seen me dance!

But listen, that little whipping was nothing compared to the stripes Jesus got as He was being whipped with that cat-o-nine-tails. I only experienced that pain for a few seconds, but for *six hours* Jesus endured the pain of not only the whipping, but the torture of the cross.

I don't know if that exactly qualifies as sharing in the fellowship of Jesus' suffering or not, but on a purely physical side, any kind of pain you go through, there is a connection point with the pain and suffering of Jesus. That's why God sometimes allows us to suffer. Next, let's see some:

2. Reactions to Suffering

Really, we don't have a choice about the reality of suffering. It's going to happen. Just hang on. The only choice we have in the matter is how we react to it. Really, we only have three options.

Option #1: Revolt in anger

Some people are so angry at God. We have about 150 here this morning, but about 550 on our church roll. If we could look into some of the homes of those 400 people who are not in church today, but who at one time were sitting right where you are today, worshipping the Lord, and if you were to ask them, *"Why aren't you in church anymore,"* some would refer back to some bad experience in their past, when their marriage failed, their business failed, their health failed, or when somebody did them dirty, or a family member died. They'd say, *"How could God make that happen, or even allow that to happen?"* They are still angry at God. They are living in a state of constant spiritual rebellion.

Option #2: Resign in apathy

Some people resign in apathy. They look at life as one big broccoli sandwich. Bad things are going to happen, and there's nothing you can do about it. They live by Murphy's law: *"Anything that can go wrong will go wrong."* Murphy's law says, *"Anything you try to fix will take longer and cost more than you think."* Murphy's law says, *"Buttered bread will always fall with the buttered side down."* Murphy's law says, *"The other line is always going to move faster than yours."* Murphy's law says, *"When you take your car to the shop to be fixed, it will work properly every time."* Apathetic people are just resigned to the notion that *"Whatever is going to happen is going to happen."*

They are like the golfer who teed up his ball, took a swing at it and missed. He tried it again and missed. His buddies were thinking *"This is going to be a long day."* He swung the third time and missed the ball completely. Then, he bent down, picked up his ball, and said, *"This course is too hard."*

That's what some people do. They pick up and walk off and say, *"Hey, this life is just too hard,"* and they

give up.

Option #3: Rejoice in obedience

Don't revolt in anger. Don't resign in apathy. Just rejoice in obedience! Don't do it because you feel like it, you do it to obey God. You've got to make the choice to rejoice—it is not a feeling!

So many times people say, *“Well, I don't feel like rejoicing.”* Let's do a little experiment. I know that some of you have already tuned me out. Some of you are just enduring church, saying, *“It'll be over in a few minutes.”* You may not feel like rejoicing right now. That's the point I want to try to make. I'd like for every one of us to say, *“Praise the Lord”* together three times. But each time you say it, get a little louder. Let's just see what happens: *“Praise the Lord!!!”*

Now, when we started out doing that, you probably didn't feel like praising the Lord. That's all right, but we did it anyway, didn't we? After the third time you kind of felt like praising the Lord, didn't you? I have news for you. This is the truth about rejoicing.

You rejoice when you don't feel like it. You keep on rejoicing until you do feel like it, and then you rejoice because you feel like it. It's not how you feel. You don't let your feelings tell you how to live. You tell your feelings how you're going to obey God. You make a choice to rejoice. Finally, let's notice the:

3. Results of Suffering

The key to being able to rejoice in suffering is found right here. You focus on the process instead of the pain. God is trying to do something in you, and through you. Our text mentions three results of suffering in our lives:

A. Suffering Produces a Commitment

Any time you go through a bad experience and you resolve to stand tall, it's a commitment to endure adversity. Now this is more than just hanging in there, it's a commitment to stand tall.

In marriages, those romantic feelings can rise and fall, but it is that commitment to stay together that is the most valuable aspect in your marriage relationship.

You just keep on loving them even when you don't feel like it. The same is true with your faithfulness to God in those times when you are going through suffering. Even in the darkest hours, you stay committed to the Lord, and you don't quit. That's persistence.

When you go through tough times, instead of giving up, say, *“I'm not going to quit. I'm going to stand tall!”*
Next,

B. Suffering Produces Character

Did you know that God is more interested in your character than your comfort? He is more interested in developing you to become more like Jesus than he is in your happiness. In fact, 1 Peter 4:13 (NIV) says, *“Rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.”* He is trying to teach us that every bad experience of our lives can develop character in us that will serve us later in life.

In 1954, Texas A&M coach Paul Bear Bryant took two busloads of football players down to Junction City, TX for 10 days of football camp. It was one of the hottest summers on record, and he was so tough and demanding on those players that more than half of them quit before it was over.

Gene Stallings was one player who stayed. He said he thought about quitting 100 times a day, but every time, he said, *“No, I'm going to go on just a little bit longer.”* He survived. Two years later the Texas A&M Aggies went undefeated, and won the Southwest Conference title.

Stallings went on to become an assistant coach for the Dallas Cowboys, then the head coach for the Arizona Cardinals, and finally the head coach at Alabama where he won the national championship.

Gene Stallings will tell you the greatest challenge of his life was not that camp in 1954, or coaching in the pros or on the college level. The biggest challenge Gene Stallings ever faced was in 1962 when his son John Mark was born with Downs Syndrome.

Gene Stallings said the character that he developed from having gone through the tough experiences in sports prepared him to face the biggest challenge of his life. Finally,

C. Suffering Produces Confidence

The Bible calls it hope. 1 Peter 5:10 (NIV) says, *“And the God of all grace who called you to His eternal glory in Christ after you have suffered a little while will Himself restore you, make you strong, firm and steadfast.”*

You've all been through some times of suffering. If you endured and you stayed faithful to God, it is developing character in you. And you're going to need it because somewhere, out there in your future, you're going to face suffering again. But since you've endured in the past, you can face whatever lies ahead without fear. You can have hope and confidence He is going to carry you through whatever happens in your future. So, we don't have to live in fear.

Conclusion: In New England there's an apple orchard where many of the trees are so loaded down with fruit that the branches are leaning over, and they have to prop the branches up. These trees, if you look at them closely have gashes and gouges on the trunks and on some of the larger branches. The owner of the orchard said, "*We discovered a long time ago that when you take a healthy apple tree that may not be producing a lot of fruit, and you cut it, gouge it, or slash it, there is something in that tree that causes it to respond in a positive way. It never fails. The trees with the most scars produce the greatest fruit.*"

Some of you out there this morning bear some scars and gouges and gashes in your personality. Sometimes God allows that to happen because He wants you to be fruitful. Jesus said, "*Herein, is my father glorified, that you produce much fruit.*" So when you are going through that suffering, that's how you can say "**PRAISE THE LORD!!**" Don't waste your sorrows!