

Sermon For Sunday March 8 2026

Romans 5:1-11 - Suffering Produces... Good?

Do you ever think about how pain is a good thing? We're always striving to manage or even eliminate pain. We take medicine that helps to take it away; we seek treatments and physical therapies that will help to end a specific pain. Why? Well, because it's painful! It's uncomfortable. It can make even everyday tasks like walking or talking difficult, so we look for options to get rid of it as much as possible.

But pain, for all of its downsides, is very important. Pain tells you that something is wrong. The pain of a sore throat might point to an infection of some sort. The pain of touching a hot burner on a cooktop ensures you won't irreversibly damage your hand, as it will cause you to pull away from the heat very quickly. Pain, for all of its downsides, has very important uses. But it can be really difficult at the moment to be thankful that you were not seriously injured while nursing a nasty burn.

In our Gospel for this morning, Jesus noted that we had to carry crosses. He didn't say this would be optional or that it might happen. He said, very clearly, that if we want to follow him, that requires self-denial and taking up our crosses.

What are crosses in the sense that Jesus spoke about? Well, we can understand them narrowly or broadly. In a narrow sense, we might think of a cross as troubles we bear, specifically because we are Christians. Maybe this is persecution or other hardship we endure because of our faith in Jesus. But we can also understand crosses more generally as anything that produces sadness, grief, hardship, or heartache in this life. Regardless, trouble is coming to us in this life. It will not be able to separate us from the love of God, but Jesus has promised us that we will not have a life without difficulty and sorrow.

In our Second Reading this morning, we are journeying back into the apostle Paul's letter to the Romans, a few chapters earlier than our look last week. While Paul's point in Chapter 8 was that God will not let trouble overwhelm us, in Chapter 5, he makes an even stronger point. Here, Paul is arguing that suffering and hardship—these crosses we have to bear—are actually *good* for us.

Now, to understand where Paul is coming from, we need to start where he starts in our reading. **Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we also have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand. And we rejoice confidently on the basis of our hope for the glory of God.** We really, really don't want to overlook this point, not only because it's

so very important for us eternally but also because it's essential to understanding Paul's point in the following verses.

We have been justified, declared not guilty of wrongdoing, through faith in Jesus Christ. We did not and cannot work off or pay off our sins. We cannot convince God to overlook them. We cannot manipulate things to look better than our neighbors and have better things happen to us than to others. No, we stand in battle with God because of our sins. And it doesn't matter if, from our arbitrary and biased point of view, we think we're better than this other person over here. God demands perfection, and we have not been perfect.

But Jesus solved that. In **v. 8**, Paul has what is perhaps my favorite single-verse summary of the gospel message in the entire Bible: **God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** Jesus' death was the solution to sin that we needed and that we have. And, again, we don't earn this or deserve this. We have it as a gift. God gives us faith to trust in his promise that he's taken away our sins. That faith doesn't accomplish anything on its own. Faith simply *receives* what Jesus did for us. Faith doesn't *cause* our justification; faith is the way we *receive* God's justification.

So, because of Jesus, this is our standing with God: forgiven, justified. Jesus took our sins away and paid for them all by his death on the cross. There is no remainder on this debt to pay, no sentence from the judge to finish; there is nothing left to do about our sins. They are gone, and we will be in heaven with God forever.

And that reality might lead us to think, "Well, if God cares that much about me for eternity, surely he cares about me a lot right now, so I must have a quiet, peaceful life to look forward to." While the premise is right (God does, in fact, care about you very much right now), the way God shows his care for us in this life might not always be what we would choose. Sometimes, he allows suffering, hardship, and sorrow into our lives. Sometimes he places those crosses on our backs. But, Paul says, he does that for a reason, and a reason that could even lead us to rejoice in these pains! **We also rejoice confidently in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces patient endurance, and patient endurance produces tested character, and tested character produces hope. And hope will not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who was given to us.**

So, what is the point of suffering? Why would we *rejoice* in it? Paul says it produces good things in us: **patient endurance, tested character, and hope.**

What does that mean? Think on a small scale: if you do touch that hot burner on the stove, it's probably not going to stop you from eating for the rest of your life, but you'll probably be that much more careful when cooking a meal. The pain and frustration of getting a speeding

ticket and having to pay the fine is likely to lead you to drive more cautiously going forward—for your safety and the safety of everyone around you.

So, too, larger-scale sufferings like heartbreak, family conflict, wrestling with personal sin along the lines of addiction, or other continual frustrations produce character and resolve in us. It allows us to see the troubles of this life, painful as they are, as temporary. We can look back and see that we made it through that suffering, that we could bear and then eventually put down that cross; God will strengthen us to do the same thing with the current cross he has placed on us.

You know that God’s purpose behind these sufferings is never to hurt you or to be painful just for pain’s sake. He’s not looking to make you suffer for your sin—Jesus already did that for you. But God does use difficulty and crosses in this life to make us resilient and stronger. In the moment going through hardship can feel overwhelming and especially so if we think that this is God preparing us for something even more difficult in the future. But that may, in fact, be what he’s doing.

But what is the big-picture purpose behind all of this? Why does God let us build endurance and character? Paul says the ultimate production is **hope**. And this is not the uncertain hope in the way that we might say, “I hope it doesn’t rain on our plans tomorrow” or “I hope that my flight isn’t delayed,” while all the while we’re assuming that those things are likely to happen. No, this is confident, certain hope in what is ahead. Paul goes on: **Therefore, since we have now been justified by [Jesus’] blood, it is even more certain that we will be saved from God’s wrath through him. For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, it is even more certain that, since we have been reconciled, we will be saved by his life. And not only is this so, but we also go on rejoicing confidently in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received this reconciliation.**

God’s ultimate goal is always to get us focused on his gift of forgiveness through Jesus, to look past this life and to the life that is coming. He might use the troubles and his guidance through those troubles to encourage us to stick firm to his promises through the faith that he has given us. He might use those hardships to be a vivid reminder that this life is not the be-all, end-all of our existence. Lest we become distracted by the joys and pleasures of this life or the pain and turmoil of our time here, God directs our eyes heavenward.

That eternal perspective is what gives us the ability to rejoice even in suffering. Because our joy is never, “I’m so glad that this terrible thing is happening to me!” but rather, “I’m so thankful that my God is with me through these difficult trials and will bring me home to himself one day.” Or, to use Paul’s words, **“We also go on rejoicing confidently in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received this reconciliation.”**

We have been united with God through the life and death of Jesus. That unity is not something that will be given to us in the future; it is the unity that we have now, today. Our sin that separated us from God is gone because **while we were still sinners, Christ died for us**. This love of God ensures our eternal safety and means that we can see the good God works, even in suffering today.

God, give us your strength to have and maintain this eternal perspective! Amen.