

Romans 12:12 (NKJV)

12 rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer;

Last week we talked about rejoicing in hope. We paraphrased it as being **really glad about what we can't wait to happen**.

After reviewing my sermon this week it dawned on me that I used a lot of the same passages this week as last week. As I thought about it, it became clear to me why this happened. As believers, we cannot talk about **hope** without talking about our **current life**, our **current tribulation**. And we can't talk about our **current tribulation** without talking about **hope**. These topics are often linked in scripture and they are also linked in our text. So please forgive me if I am a little redundant. I think you will find, though, that we are looking at these passages with a slightly different slant

The first thing we want to do, like so many times before, is to look at the context of our verse. We want to look at the flow of thought.

It is easy to read Romans 12 and get the idea that Paul has a list of things that he doesn't want to leave out in his advice to the Romans so he just starts listing them helter-skelter. But that is not true. Paul is laying out a progression of thought where **everything that follows** has been built on the foundation of **what has been said before**.

Let's look at Romans 5:1-3

1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand,

See what Paul starts with? The foundation of salvation provided by Christ. That is just like chapter 12 where Paul says in verse 1- In view of God's Mercies.

and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

And he moves into rejoicing in hope, rejoicing in that **which we are certain** will happen. Now note the next thing he moves to in his flow of thought.

3 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations,

He moves right from hope to tribulations. I believe there is good reason for that. We'll get to that in a little bit. Then he continues and gives us some insight into why we have tribulation.

knowing that tribulation produces perseverance;

4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope.

5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

So we see the same flow of thought as in our text. First is the assurance of our salvation. Then there is the **culmination** of that salvation that we are **wild eyed looking forward to- our future glory and reward**. And then there is the reality of our **temporary condition**.

I think it is a wonderful thing that the Bible always addresses **real people** in a **real world**. It is not idealistic. It is not flowery. It never leads us to believe that this life will be better than it is.

Does it make you angry when you **read** or **hear** preaching that portrays the Christian life as one that has heaven both now and into eternity? The name-it and claim-it mentality that treats God as an undiscerning grandfather and all Christians as spoiled rotten brats **demanding** of their grandfather **everything we can dream** of that would appease our **fleshly desires**? That preaching is sickening and evil. It is only found by **twisting** the words of scripture, not by **studying** them. Now we, as a congregation, would spot that kind of teaching quite quickly I think. We would recognize it as being wrong. But don't we do the same thing much more subtly? Don't we carry expectations toward this life that **God has never promised us?**

This morning, **what do you expect your life to be?** And how will you respond to God if your life doesn't shape up that way?

Do you expect God to keep all your loved ones safe?

Do you expect to be free from pain and sickness?

Do you expect to be loved and appreciated by those around you?

What is it that you think God owes you? **There are very few things that are more dangerous in a believer's life**. Because unrealistic expectations are weaknesses that the enemy of our souls is very quick to exploit. It is a sure fire way to temporarily derail your faith.

All the devil needs to do is get permission to **take away that thing that you expect**, and down into a swoon you go.

So think about it? What do you **expect** from God that He has not **promised** you?

When any of our hopes get **misdirected** toward **this life** we place our faith in danger. Our hope must only be on those things **that God has promised us**.

Nothing else. Our hope is based on the future glorification of believers. Our hope is something sure to happen **in the future**, not **now**. We cannot get confused about that. We can't allow our hope to be misdirected.

This morning, as an elder, this is a real source of concern to me. Think about your life. Think about the times that you drifted away from your relationship with Christ. Wasn't it exactly **this very thing** that caused it to happen? You expected

your life to be different. You expected your spouse to be more loving. You expected your parents to be more sympathetic. You expected to be treated better by those in your church. You expected that no one that you loved would die. You expected that your reputation would be kept intact. We could go on and on. Do you know what? **Christ never promised a single one of those things.** He didn't promise loving family relationships. He didn't promise lives free from calamity. In fact He really warned of the direct opposite. So examine your expectations. If they are based on anything but the promises of God, what they really are-are vulnerabilities. They are spiritual land mines.

The other part of this is that we are so prone to equate God's love to our expectations. We start the "If God loved me" game. We think if God loved me He would not have had me fired from my job. He would not have allowed my spouse to leave me. He would not have me so misunderstood and alone. And on and on. Oddly enough, our text this morning is the remedy to all the **problems like that** that we bring upon ourselves. It is the solution to the things that we set up in our minds that could so easily put us in a swoon.

patient in tribulation

Let's look at the words.

Patient means "to persevere": absolutely and emphatically, under misfortunes and trials to hold fast to one's faith in Christ. It is to keep on keeping on.

Tribulation means "a pressing, pressing together, pressure" in Biblical and ecclesiastical writings, a Greek metaphor, "oppression, affliction, tribulation, distress, straits";

A Tribulum was an instrument that put great pressure on grain to grind it. So tribulation is having great pressure placed upon us, pressure that would often crush one. A tribulation is anything that puts great pressure upon you. It is anything that makes you want to cry out saying I cannot handle this. It is that kind of difficulty.

So to **paraphrase our text** we could say "**keep on keeping on under the great pressure that you find yourself under.**"

You know what? I am very glad that we have this command. Because it means that any of these pressures we feel are **normal** and an **expected** part of our walk with Christ. They do not, in any way, prove that God does not care for us, or that we have displeased God in any way. Let's look at what God tells us about what our lives will be like.

First lets look at what Paul says about his own life. Now keep in mind that this was a man precious to God. He was a man singled out to accomplish great things

for the kingdom of God. Shouldn't he have been able to expect that this would work out into a blessedness in this world, a world where all would go well because he was so special to God? Think about that as we read this again.

2 Corinthians 4:7-11 (NKJV)

7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.

8 We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;

9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—

How is that for being under pressure, under a weight? Paul really knew what he was talking about. He was human just like we are. He felt the pain and pressure. He goes on.

10 always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

11 For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

Do you see the expectation that Paul is creating here for the Christian life? Do you see how he describes this life? Not very pleasant is it? Not something to base your hopes on, is it?

Let's look at more of Paul's tribulations or pressures.

2 Corinthians 11:23-33 (NKJV)

23 Are they ministers of Christ?--I speak as a fool--I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often.

24 From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one.

25 Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep;

26 in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;

27 in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness--

28 besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.

29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?

30 If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity.

31 The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.

32 In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me;

33 but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.

OK- anyone here that can't wait to have those kinds of experiences? Do you see what I mean about hope in this life? This is what life on this planet had in store for one of God's favorites. Here is the life of someone that we know for sure that God loved. So how did Paul persevere? How did he keep on keeping on? **He kept his hope fixed where it should be fixed.** His hope was in the resurrection that Christ would provide.

OK, we might say, but **that is Paul.** I am not special like him. What does this life have in store for me? Christ told his disciples this:

John 16:32-33 (NKJV)

32 Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.

33 These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

Here Christ lays out a clear expectation for his followers. In this world you are going to have pressure, you are going to have tribulation. Some of it will come from without. You will have persecutors. Some of it will come from temptations and trials of your faith. But the nature of this world will cause you to want to cry out under its burden. You can count on it.

In fact, look what Peter says.

1 Peter 4:12-14 (NKJV)

12 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you;

13 but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

14 If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.

Isn't this a little tough? He is saying- stuff is getting hard for you? And you are surprised??? Get over it. That isn't strange. That is no reason to sulk or doubt God's love for you. That is no reason to tell God you are facing more than you bargained for. That is normal. That is what happens in this world. What did you really expect? If they hated me, did you really think they would love you? If they killed me, did you really think they would applaud you?

No, and if this tribulation is happening, do you know the most reasonable response? The most logical and reasonable response is to **rejoice**. It is to be glad. Why? Because you now love pain? No that is stupid and sick. No, it is because we have had an opportunity to represent Christ. And evidently we represented Him well enough that we received the same kind of treatment **He would have received if he were here**. Our suffering is an **endorsement of our identity**. It is like a stamp that says- yep this person is one of Christ's too. It shows that the Holy Spirit is in you. It means you are doing something right.

And what makes this worth enduring through? What makes you want to keep on keeping on?

that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

You know what makes it worthwhile? The finish line. The finish line is what makes it all worthwhile. When we stand before Christ and He says, **Well done my good and faithful servant**, all the suffering we have ever done will be worth every second. When Christ comes back, how many hours of ease we had will be insignificant. But every faithful act and every sacrifice will suddenly be the things we are most glad about. Every effort spent in the cause of Christ will suddenly raise above all our efforts to be safe and secure. What we are talking about is HOPE. It is the rejoicing in hope that prepares us for the persevering in tribulation.

Here is another passage letting us know what to expect.

Acts 14:21-22 (NKJV)

**21 And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch,
22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."**

Paul never soft sold the cost of the gospel. He always revealed what it would cost. And he never apologized for it. Because he always preached that what we will **receive** is worth so much more than we will **suffer**. He tells his audience here, you know how we will get from **where we are** to **our final destination**? Through tribulations. It is going to be tough.

Now with all of this cost, why in the world would God put His people through this?

Well we have already seen that it becomes an opportunity for us to identify with Christ. And that is good. But there is more to be gained. Let's look at a couple of passages that tell us what is gained.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 (NKJV)

16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.

17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,

18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

We see here two things.

First our inward man is being renewed. This process of tribulation causes inner growth in the Christian life.

And second we see that it somehow is working an eternal weight in glory. It looks to me that it is increasing our reward in heaven. So it isn't like these hard times are pointless. It is not like they have no purpose. It is not like nothing is gained through them. They are being used by God for a purpose.

Let's look at another text.

James 1:2-4 (NKJV)

2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,

3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

It is really important that we get this.

Those oppressive situations we find ourselves in, those spots that make us cry out to God, those spots that we would not choose for ourselves in a million years....

You know what I mean. You know those spots where your soul is in anguish. Those times you cannot see how things are going to work out. Those times when you feel like your heart will explode.

We learn from God's word that **not** only **aren't** those situations designed for our harm. They are custom designed for our good. Not only are they **not a punishment from God**, they are a **tool in God's hand** to make us more like Him. Here we are told to count it joy when we fall into one of those. Why? It shows that our loving God **is at work in our lives**. And he is going to make something cool out of us. He has this situation placed as a tool to test our faith which will produce the quality in us **whereby we keep on keeping on**. He will exercise us so we get better and better at that. And if we will stick with the program and not go all whimpy, God will use the process to make us perfect and complete. In other words, He will get us where He wants us to be. He will use his training program to get us into spiritual shape. What could be better than that?

If you get nothing else from this morning, please get this point. When your life is incredibly hard, God is incredibly busy accomplishing what He wants for your life. Do no doubt God. Do not doubt God's love. Do not put Him in the wrong light. God loves you. Submit to the Lord in your tribulation and you will find that he will turn it into gold right before your eyes.

Let's look at one more passage. Here are three verses in Psalm 119

67 Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word.

We all have rough edges. We all need changes. We all need to grow. We all need to become more capable spiritually. And God knows this way more than we do. And He knows how we are. When all is going well we don't learn much. When all is going well it is very hard for Him to get our attention. But when things are hard, suddenly we are all about God. He has all our attention. We are calling out to Him like crazy. God isn't stupid. He loves us too much to not use those things that He knows will get our attention, that will get us to move in His direction.

David caught on to what was happening. He says

71 It is good for me that I have been afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes.

Do you see how David read tribulation? He looked at it and he said- that's a **good** thing. Why? Cause it is the thing, and maybe the **only** thing, that got me to read God's word. It got me to learn what God wants. It redirected my focus. It got me serious about spiritual things. David can look at these hard times, these pressure times, these crushing times and say- yep They were good cause they got me on track.

Then a little later he says

75 I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are right, And that in faithfulness You have afflicted me.

David states that he sees everything through God's sovereignty. If God is sovereign, nothing just happens. Everything is ordered by God for a purpose. Here David is saying, you know what God? **You were right.** I needed that situation. I needed that circumstance. Had I not had it I never would have realized my sinfulness or weakness. Had I not had it I would have never changed those things about me that I was unaware of. In fact, I would have never even **cared** about them. But you were right. I needed that. And it was not a sign that **you did not love me** that you allowed it to happen. It was actually a sign that you **did** love me. You were being faithful to me. You were being loving to me.

Oh how long it sometimes takes us to get to that place where we say- Yes Lord. You love me enough to do the hard things. You love me enough to test me. You love me enough to make me examine the parts **I do not want** to examine. Are you in something like that in your life? Are you resisting God? Are you accusing God? You wanna be smart? You wanna be biblical? Give it up. Those attitudes will only hurt you. They will only delay your spiritual growth. They will only keep you in your misery. Give it up and just trust God. Thank Him that He knows what is best for you. And you will find that your current situation will be used for your good and for the good of His children.

Oh and in closing let's look at one last thing.

Look at the best news. Look what tribulation cannot do. Not only is tribulation not a sign that God does not love us. Look at this.

Romans 8:35-39 (NKJV)

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

36 As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."

37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,

39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

No tribulation that a true believer ever finds him or herself in will ever separate him or her from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

Isn't that a wonderful truth this morning? Can't we just break out in praise toward God for this?

I challenge you to consider this week this question. What do you expect out of life that God has not promised to you? Weed that out of your life now and you will rest in the safety of God's love.