

Rebuilding the Foundations - Romans
Part 9
“Three Good Reasons to Rejoice”
Reading: Romans 5:1-11
Pastor Charles Price

Now I'm going to read some verses from Romans 5:1-11. Paul writes this,

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 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. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character, and character, hope. 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. You see, at just the right time, when we were still sinners, we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely would anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him to the death of his son, how much more having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”

Well, that's as far as we're reading, and the context in which any statement occurs is important.

A farmer was once driving his mule and his dog along the roads, and they came to a corner when a truck coming in the opposite direction came right across the road, smacked into the farmer and his mule and his dog and knocked them into the ditch. Well, the farmer decided he would sue the trucking company for damages and in court, the lawyer for the trucking company asked the farmer, "Did you say at the time of the accident, I am absolutely fine?" And the farmer responded, "Well, let me tell you what happened. I was walking along the road," and the lawyer intervenes, "I didn't ask for details. Just answer the question. Did you or did you not say at the scene of the accident, I am absolutely fine?" The farmer said, "Well, my mule and my dog and I were walking along the road where on the corner..." And the lawyer said, "Judge, I'm trying to establish the fact that at the scene of the accident, this man told the policeman he was absolutely fine. Please tell him to answer the question."

And the judge was intrigued at this point, so he said, "Please tell us your story." So, the farmer said, "Well, your honour, my mother, my dog and I walk along the road when this truck came round the corner on the wrong side of the road smacked into us. And I was thrown into the ditch. My mule was knocked against the fence and my dog ended up in the field. I was hurting badly, but I could hear my mule groaning, and I knew it was a terrible pain and I could hear my dog whining, lying in the field, and I knew that he was in pain. And then the policemen arrived. He went over to the mule and saw it was in bad shape. Its legs were broken, so he took his gun and he shot it. He went to the dog. He found the dog's back was broken. He took his gun and he shot it. And then he came to me and he said, "Listen, your mule was in such bad shape, I had to shoot it. Your dog was in bad shape, I had to shoot him. How are you feeling?" "And I said," your honour, "I'm absolutely fine."

You see, context is everything when it comes to interpreting something that has been said, and there's something which Paul says three times in these verses that if we don't understand the context, we might feel a little unrealistic because three times in these verses, Paul uses the word 'rejoice'.

He says in Romans 5:2, "We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God", he says in Romans 5:3 three. "We rejoice in our sufferings." He says in Romans 5:11, "We rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ." And when a word like that occurs several times, you get the idea, this is probably the main thing that the writer has in mind or one of the main things he has in mind.

Three Good Reasons to Rejoice

And I want to talk to you this morning about three good reasons to rejoice. Now, if you understand the context of this, you say, "Well, this and what do you mean three good reasons to rejoice? I've had a terrible week, had a big fight with my wife. The kids are running wild. My car slipped off the road. What do you mean rejoice?"

Well, let's look at the context. Romans 5:1 begins with the words, "Therefore", that's an important word.

"Therefore, since we have been justified to faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Now you've heard it said before that when you come across the word, 'therefore' in the Bible, always ask yourself, 'what is it there for.' Because the therefore is there for a good reason. It is a link where everything that's gone before and what is going to follow.

Now what has gone before? We have to understand that to understand what Paul is going to talk about. And in the first four chapters, (Romans 1-4) if you have been listening in recent weeks, you will know that we've been looking in these early chapters of Romans, and Paul has explained there that the dilemma that we as a human race find ourselves in. We are separated from God. We're all involved in sin. That isn't enough, though, we find ourselves under the wrath of God, he says, and we find ourselves facing the judgment of God. Now that's the unpleasant but realistic diagnosis that Paul gives us of the human condition. But midway through Romans 3, he suddenly says, but now something is happening.

And he talks there about the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ co-equal with his father, God became a human being lived a perfect life and as a substitute for human men and women, satisfied the wrath of God and the judgment of God by his sacrifice on the cross.

And as a result, as Romans 4 teaches us, as we put faith in Christ, we are justified. That's a key word that he uses in these early chapters. And to be justified is a legal term. It means that justice has been satisfied, there is no more issue to face, you are free.

Well, that's all good of course, we've talked about that these last few weeks. That's a wonderful thing. But now, he says in Romans 5. Therefore, because this is true, how are we supposed to live?

What is supposed to be the consequences in our lives? And the following chapters talk about this. But I wanted to pick out these three things, where he talks about one of the things is to be the evidence. Now that you're justified, you've been reconciled to God, is you've got to be characterized by rejoicing. Not a grit your teeth and clenched your fists and say, I must rejoice. That's pretty difficult. But you rejoice because there is reason, good reason, to rejoice no matter what's happening to you.

1. Our Position: We Have Peace with God

Now, that's three things, first of all in Romans 5:1. "Therefore, since you've been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." My first point is that we rejoice in our position.

Our position is we have peace with God. Now he doesn't use the word rejoice in that sentence, though later in Romans 5:11, he says, "We rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation" as talking about the same thing. So, rejoice in our reconciliation. We have peace with God.

Now what do you mean by peace with God? The Bible speaks of two kinds of peace that we can experience in relation to God. It speaks of peace with God here in this passage. And it speaks of the peace of God in Philippians 4:7, for an example where he speaks of “the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Now that second, the peace of God, is a subjective peace, it's an inner peace, it's a sense of tranquillity of heart, and that is a wonderful thing. And we're not going to talk about that this morning.

Peace with God is an objective issue. That is, it has nothing to do with how you may be feeling. That has everything to do with what your position is, your standing is, before God. You see Romans 5:10 says, “If we were God's enemies.” That's a description Paul uses of what we were like. Previously we were God's enemies. There is enmity, there is hostility there between God and human beings. That is how we were, that's a past tense statement. We were God's enemies.

And now here in Romans 5:1, in the present tense, we “have peace with God.” There's been a transition from being an enemy of God to being at peace with God. Now what does that mean? What that means is this, that there is no longer any hostility between God and ourselves. You see, chapters one and two of Romans are about the fact that there is — by nature — hostility between God and human beings. He speaks there of the wrath of God being revealed from heaven against the godlessness and wickedness of men. We are polarized. God in His Holiness and we in our wickedness and godlessness, there is wrath between God and human beings. Also, in Romans 1, he talks about God giving people over — we talked about that a few weeks ago — to the sinful

desires of their hearts. He lets them go. Romans 2 speaks about the stubbornness of an unrepentant hearts between ourselves and God. He talks about stirring up wrath against ourselves. He talks about God judging men's secrets through Jesus Christ. And all these statements in the early part of Romans are indications of hostility that exist between God and human beings.

But something's happened, he says. We have been justified. And as a result, we have peace with God. That God is no longer someone with whom we are in enmity, no longer someone to fear as a judge, but to enjoy as a friend.

Now, you may say some of you may be saying to yourself, well, this is pretty basic stuff and it probably is, but there are many, many Christians and I'm told by those who are already Christians who do not experience the sense of being at peace with God.

One of the activities of the devil, Satan, we're told in the Book of Revelation 12:10 is that he is the 'accuser of the brethren.' The accuser of those who are Christians. It says "he accuses them before God day and night." See, one of the things the devil loves to do is accuse us. So when it comes to our sin, the devil on the first hand tells us, "Come on, it's going to be fun. Come on, do it, come on. You'll enjoy it. Look, it looks good. It feels good. Come on. Everybody else is doing it anyway. Come on, it won't matter. Come on, do it. That's do it. Yea! Enjoy it! Wow! Get into it. Really enjoy your sin."

And the moment you do have any conscience at all. He jumps on your back and says, “You dirty, filthy, stinking, rotten failure. You sinner. God hates this in you, doesn't he? You stinking little Christian.”

If you have experienced that, that's his job as the accuser of the brethren. You see, both God and the devil speak to us about our sin. But they speak very differently, and when God speaks about our sin, he convicts. When the devil speaks about us and he condemns and there's a difference. When the devil condemns, condemnation is like a wet blanket that sits on you, and you can't move from under it. But when God convicts us of our sin, he always makes us aware of sin, but at the same time, he always makes us aware of the way out. Because the purpose which he convicts us is not to humiliate us or to condemn us, but to liberate us. But do you see that many of us who find it easier to believe that we're dirty than to believe that we're clean. Because you know, and I know fine well, my heart is dirty. You know fine well; we're going to win this week in all likelihood. We know fine well that things that we struggle with and we're going to struggle with the same things again next week. But the marvelous thing is that we can be forgiven, justified and brought to peace with God.

Let me illustrate the problem that many Christians do have. I remember talking to a lady some time ago now when I was in England. She told me that for 20 years she had confessed to God a particular sin that she had been involved in her late teens. I didn't ask her for detail, and I didn't need to know detail. But she said for 20 years, she was now around 40, for 20 years, I've confessed this sin to God, probably just about every day of these last 20 years. She said the memory of that sin and the consequence of that sin have sat on me the whole of this time. “It has

impacted my marriage,” she said, “It's made me a poor mother to my children.” She told me that the church she attended asked her if she would teach a Sunday school class several times because she was very capable with children. But she said, “I have turned it down every time because I know what I'm like and I know my past. I couldn't possibly serve God because of my history.”

And I was able to say to her, you know, for 20 years, it's never been God who spoken to you about that sin. For 20 years, the devil has gained a foothold in your life. Because you see, he's the accuser of the brethren when you are aware of this sin how do you feel? Do you feel overwhelmed and swamped like a wet blanket? She said, “That's exactly how I feel.” Do you not feel when you're aware of that sin, thank God, that there is a way out of it. She said, “I wish I could feel that.” I said, “This is not God's voice you're hearing it all.”

The devil is an accuser. There is a story in the Old Testament, in the Book of Zachariah, of a man called Joshua. And he came and stood before God. It says, Zachariah 3:1-4, I will just read it quickly.

“He showed me Joshua, the high priest standing before the Angel of the Lord and Satan was standing at his right-hand side to accuse him. And the Lord said to Satan, “The Lord, rebuke you, Satan” ... Now, Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes. He stood before the angel, and the angel said to those who were standing before him, “take off his filthy clothes.” And he said to Joshua, “You see, I've taken away your sin. I'll put rich garments on you.”

Beautiful story. Zechariah 3, read it sometime. Of a dialogue between Satan and God and Satan is accusing, accusing, accusing. And you see, sometimes we're very sensitive about our sin because we know fine well that we don't deserve forgiveness and we don't but it's not to do with what we deserve because this passage says in Romans 5:6, "While we were still powerless, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8 says, "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." It doesn't say while we were managing to help ourselves a little bit, God came and helped us a bit more. Isn't that great? It does not say that. We were powerless, we were sinners, and he came to rescue us.

And there's a great verse, Romans 8:1, which says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." No condemnation. And I had the lady read that verse, we read it together and we made it personal and we read it this way, 'there is therefore now no condemnation of me because I am in Christ Jesus.'

Are you enjoying peace with God this morning? Because despite what you know about yourself, you can get up in the morning and you can know that your conscience is clear because you've come to the cross and we rejoice, being in peace with God.

2. Our Prospects: The Hope of the Glory of God

The second thing we rejoice about is in Romans 5:2, he says, "Through whom we have gained access by faith, endless grace in which we now stand, and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God."

Now, if rejoicing in being at peace with God is dealing with our past, rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God is dealing with our future. Now, what is the hope of the glory of God? Well, the best commentary on the Bible is always the Bible. It's also the cheapest and the most reliable, and you go back a couple of chapters and it explains itself. Romans 3:23 a verse which many of you may know, says "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." That's the summary of our predicament. The word sin, as you well know, means to miss the mark. It came from archery. Originally, you fire an arrow at a target, you miss the target, it's called sin. By how far you miss is not the issue, an inch or a mile, it's still sin. It's missing the mark. That means that we do not know what sin is unless we know what the mark is that we have missed, and the mark, says Paul, is the glory of God.

Now the word glory occurs 18 times in the Book of Romans. And if you look at it through and examine the usage of the word, it has various connotations depending on its context. But essentially, the glory of God is the character of God. It's God's moral character. We have sinned, we've come short of God's moral character and now, says Paul, "We rejoice in the hope of hitting the target, the glory of God", of the moral character of God being restored into our experience.

You may remember way back in the beginning, we pointed out in Romans 1 when Paul said "Not ashamed of the gospel it's the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For this reason, for in the gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith." And righteousness is God's moral character. Now, says Paul, we rejoice in the fact that this of which we have come short all the time, we rejoice in the hope now

of hitting that target at the glory, the character of God being restored into our experience. And if you're a Christian this morning, Romans 8 tells us you are predestined to be glorified, which means for the full image of God to be restored into your life.

You see Romans 8:30, says "those he predestined, he also called those he called, he also justified those he justified, he also glorified." Now, for those who have been called and justified, there is something which he says is now predestined. That is, it's not a choice anymore, because you've been brought into union with Christ, you are going to be glorified. You're going to be fully restored into the image in which God originally created us as an expression of his character. Now, this won't happen in its fullness in this life. In this life, there is a process taking place, 2 Corinthians 3:18 says "with unveiled faces reflect the Lord's glory and are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord who has the spirit."

That is a process. It's not we have been transformed or will be transformed; it is we are being transformed into his likeness with every increase in glory. That is what we call sanctification, that is the growth of godliness in this life. But it's going to come to its culmination, one day we are going to be glorified. And it's wonderful to remind ourselves of that. I know what I struggle with today. You know what you struggle with today. I know the sins where I am especially vulnerable, and they pull me down. You probably know that in your life as well. But the day is going to come. I'm going to be fully restored into the image of Jesus. I think my wife is more excited about that than I am. I'm actually going to make it one day I'm predestined, and when life is tough and when you're aware of your failure, we come in humility and we confess it, of course, but we rejoice and at peace with God. My past is dealt with and I rejoice in the hope of

the glory of God. I'm actually going to get there. Isn't that great, are you rejoicing in that? But this isn't escapism of course, it's not, well just put our heads in the sand and dream of our land yet to come. But this is a reality. It's part of the gospel. We're going to be fully restored and 50 years from today, probably ten years from today, I'm going to be perfect because I'll be in heaven and that's coming.

3. Our Problems: Suffering Is a Tool for Perfection

But there's a third thing you see, if I rejoice in the fact I've been reconciled to God and I have peace with God, that's my past, that's in order. I rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, that's my future, that's in order. What about the present? But here's an interesting one. It's in Romans 5:3. "Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings," uh oh. "That's not supposed to be there is it? We rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character and character hope." Now, this is an interesting one and probably a difficult one. And I'm calling it, 'rejoice in our problems'. Rejoice in a position, rejoice in our prospects, and rejoice in our problems. Now, the past is great, the future is wonderful, the present sounds a bit like a bummer, doesn't it? Who wants to have suffering, let alone who wants to rejoice in it?

You can go to any good bookstore and you'll find books on how to handle your problems, you find books on how to avoid problems, books on how to manage your problems, books on how to reduce your problems, books and how to get rid of your problems. You probably will never find a book on how to rejoice in your problems. But this is the perspective that Paul is giving it, in

fact, if we are going to enjoy the glory of God, we're going to have to learn to live with suffering too.

I'll tell you why, Romans 8:17, a couple of pages away, "Now, if we are children, then we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may share in his glory."

Now, it's not here is the glory, that's the good bit, and here's the sufferings, that's the catch that's the nasty bit. He says sharing in his sufferings is going to contribute to sharing in his glory. Romans 8:18 says, "I consider the present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us." So, there he contrasts it. Hey, this is nothing, our present sufferings, look at what's coming. But the gulf which we have been predestined as Christians, which is to be restored into the image, to show the glory of God, to have the righteousness of God fully expressed in our lives. Then if that is the goal for which we are predestined, then the tool for perfecting that is our sufferings. No one goes looking for suffering, nor should we. But it is a reality of life. And all suffering is relative. What are problems to me are nothing to somebody else. And by the way, he doesn't say we rejoice in your sufferings. We don't rejoice in other people's sufferings, we rejoice in our sufferings, he says, I rejoice in mine, Why?

a) Suffering Produces

Because I'll give you three reasons. First of all, because suffering produces, there in Romans 5:3. Now he tells us what to produce above underlined those two words heavily in my Bible.

Suffering produces, suffering again and again is a creative force in our lives, and I believe that we desperately need to rediscover a New Testament understanding of suffering. You see suffering has dignity in the New Testament, it says of Jesus in the Book of Hebrews, “He learned obedience by the things he suffered.” (Hebrews 5:8) Now that is not implied Jesus was ever disobedient, but in becoming a man, he did not take the fast track through life or the soft road through life. He was tempted at all points, like as we, we were told that. And he learned obedience by the things he suffered, and I am presuming that that suffering are events that took place in the years about which we know nothing as he grew up to maturity, we know nothing from one incident until he was 30 after his birth.

During those years there and unknown events by which he learned obedience. And if that was good enough for Jesus, how much more is it going to so for you and for me? You see, hard times can bring good returns. We learn far more from our tears than we ever learned from our laughter. It's good to laugh. But we learn more from our tears, so much so that one of the Psalms tells us, I think it's Psalm 56, that God keeps our tears in his bottle. Why does God keep our tears in his bottle? Is it because he has a morbid interest in our tears? No, because our tears again and again have been an investment in our growth and our maturity and in the production of God's character in the moulding of our lives into his image.

That's why he says we rejoice in our sufferings, as far as other people's sufferings are concerned, of course, we weep with those who weep, we mourn with those who mourn. But as far as our own sufferings are concerned, we rejoice in them.

My wife has said in the past, so she said to me in the past, and I think it's very true. And in the Old Testament, God's blessing was seen in prosperity. But in the New Testament, God's blessing is seen in adversity. And all the good things that God produces under the New Covenant come often through adversity. That's why Jesus told his disciples in John, 16. "In this world, you will have trouble." He didn't say, I hope you don't, but you might. He said you will. Paul In Acts 14 on his first missionary journey, told his new converts that they must go through hardships to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of God. That is, to enjoy the kingship of Christ in your life, you're going to go through hardships because it's the hardships that will mould you and conform you into his submission to his kingship. You see, rejoicing in our suffering is not a masochism — masochism is finding pleasure in pain — there's no pleasure and pain. It's rejoicing because of the end product, because suffering produces, it's a creative force.

b) Suffering Matures

Second point is, the suffering produces is the first issue there, suffering matures. Because you might ask the question, what does it produce? Well, it says in Romans 5:3, "suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character and character hope." Suffering will produce, he says, perseverance, that is a maturing process. Perseverance will produce character, that is a maturing process. Character produces hope. That's a maturing process. You see, suffering will either be a creative force in our lives, producing something positive or it will become a destructive force in our lives producing anger and bitterness.

One of the best things to mould character is living through things you don't like, and living well through things you don't like. When I was 16, I spent my summer working in a Christian conference centre, and I was given a job to do which I wasn't enjoying doing. And the guy who is in charge of me said to me one day, "You're not enjoying this, are you?" And I said, "No, I'm not." He said, "Good." I said, "Why do you say good?" He said, "This will be good for your character. Keep doing it and do it well." I never forgot that, because I didn't like it. You don't forget things you don't like, but it's true. I'm convinced that's true. Some of us, you know, we don't stick with the tough things in life. And we become wimps and soft, and we don't develop character. But dealing with the tough things, not taking the easy option, but going through things that are tough, you rarely meet people who really know God who have not been through suffering because that's again and again where they've met him. Because in their weakness, they discover his strengths.

The King James version for this verse says, "we glory in tribulations, knowing the tribulation worketh patience." I remember reading something Cheney wrote in one of his books when he said a lady came to him one day and asked him if he would pray for her.

He said, "What is your needs? I need God to give me more patience." He said, "I'll gladly pray for you" and apparently in this book, he says, they knelt together, and he said, "Lord, I know nothing about this lady, except that she needs patience. And so, I pray that you bring into her life such difficulties and hardships and tribulations that you won't know what to do." And apparently, as he was praying, this lady who was kneeling to start with got up and grabbed him and shook him and said, "Stop, I've got enough of that." He said, Madam, you don't understand, tribulation

works patience, you want patience, this is the route it'll come to you through, through tribulations.

And then it leads to hope, perseverance, character and hope. We've already talked about the hope of the glory of God. We'll talk about hope more fully in Romans 8 in a few weeks' time because Paul talks about hope there. But just to say this, this is not sort of wishful thinking, you know, I hope it'll be a hot day tomorrow. That's a bit of wishful thinking, but I'm hoping to get home safely this afternoon. Now that's a declared intent, or I'm hoping to have lunch today. That's a positive expectation. You have planned that you've either put it in the oven or you brought your money for Swiss chalet or whatever you're going to do. Now, it's not the "I hope it's going to be a hot day tomorrow" kind of wistful thinking. This is not the hope that this talks about, but the positive expectation. I am hoping to have lunch in an hour's time. And this hope, which characterizes the Christian means that nothing need frighten us, we are talking about this in Romans 8, because we have a hope and a certainty.

c) Suffering Softens

But the third thing about suffering — suffering produces, and suffering matures — suffering softens is the implication of Romans 5:5, for he says there, that "hope does not disappoint us because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us". That as we suffer and develop perseverance and character and hope, we discover God pouring out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit and we become softened by his love.

Of course, it's possible to become hardened by our sufferings. When we suffer, it can drive us to God, or it can drive us from God. Remember, Job lost his business, his children, his health and he fell on his face before God and said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked all depart the Lord has given the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." And it says in this Job did not sin. That is in Job 1:21, but in Job 2:9 his wife came to him and she said, "Curse God and die." That is, let him finish you off. Very interesting because Mr and Mrs Job suffered the same things, his income was her income. His children were her children. They both hurt. He worshiped - she cursed. The same event can trigger a totally different response, and maybe some of you here this morning and there are things in your life and they're suffering in your life and you're cursing. We don't know what happened to Mrs. Job, except that she evidently survived and survived well because she produced another ten children, wasn't it? Some woman! But you can come back in humility and, yes, talking about Job, Job had his questions, he certainly had his questions. But Job learned to rejoice in the midst of it.

Last March, I was in China and met in a town in the southern part of China with a pastor who has spent more than 20 years in prison for his faith in Christ. He leads a meeting in his home. His home is a three story, quite a big building. And every Sunday, they have 3000 people who pass through that home in I think it's seven or eight sittings. Every free space in that home there are seats and benches just crammed together. There's an aisle with it with a slide out seat that when the house is full, they slide across the aisle so the aisle gets full as well. There is a television monitor on every floor, and he speaks on the top floor to those who can cram in there. There's a little video camera in front of him and it's relayed, right through the house - 3000 altogether in these seven or eight sittings passed through the house. And I sat and talked to him and my

daughter was with me — Hannah — and we had a little video camera and she videoed an interview with him, which I'm not going to show you because it's bad quality. But we asked him about his situation, and he said, “You know, we had a house group in my home. We had 30 people. And then the police came, they interrogated me, and they put me in jail for two years, and when I came back, there were 300 people.” And he said, put his hands up. “Persecution is good for us,” he said. “And a couple of years later, they arrested me again, put me in jail, I stayed there this time for five years,” I think it was, “when I came back there were 1000 people in this group. Persecution is good!” he said. “Then they put me away for twelve or 13 years. When I came back, there were 3000 in my home. He said persecution is good.” We can't say that because we know nothing about persecution. I'm just telling what he said.

I've learned to rejoice because we know that it produces. And you see, we've got grounds to rejoice. We've got grounds to go home today and into this new week, no matter what's happening this week, no matter what happens in your personal life, you can rejoice. I have peace with God. You can rejoice because I'm predestined to share the glory of God that is going to happen. That's going to happen. I'm not going to be a failure for eternity. I'm going to share his glory.

And then thirdly I can rejoice in the fact that this is going to be a tough week and the devil will be on my back, of course, he will. Things will go wrong in my home. Maybe things will go wrong in my place of work. Things can go wrong in my relationships. All kinds of things can seem to be difficult. And of course, we need to keep those things right as best we can. But instead of being defeated we say, ‘Lord Jesus, thank you so much that this produces something in me.’

Tough times produce perseverance. Tough times will mature me — It'll produce character and hope — and tough times will soften me because my backs against the wall and I feel aware of my own limitations, it's then that God pours his love into my heart by the Holy Spirit. And filled with an awareness that I'm loved, and it softens me.

Are you a Christian this morning — if you are — you've got reasons to rejoice, these are just three good reasons, they're probably many of us. Will you rejoice this week in what you have in the Lord Jesus Christ? But if you're not a Christian this morning and maybe some of you here and some of you listening on television and you're not a Christian. But you say I wish I could know this kind of life. I wish I could know this kind of relationship that you're talking about. The marvellous thing is you can. You come in humility and say, Lord Jesus Christ, I realize I'm separated from you, that you died to reconcile me to God. Please forgive me. Come and live within my heart. Make me a new creation in Christ and you'll be justified. And since we're justified, we can rejoice. Let's pray together.

Closing Prayer

Father, we're grateful this morning that you're here among us and by the Holy Spirit, you've been speaking personally into hearts here and there about issues in their lives that they need to bring to you. Those of us who don't know you, Lord, bring us into a living relationship with Jesus today, this morning. For those of us who know you help us to rejoice in our being at peace with God, not allow the condemnation of the devil to pull us down, as so often he does. To rejoice in our prospects, we look forward to that wonderful day when we will see you face to face and more

than that, we'll be like you. And in the nitty gritty of life, help us to rejoice in our sufferings because through them you are producing a reflection of your own character. Help us to see this, we pray in Jesus name. Amen.