Rom. 5:1-5; Deuteronomy 8:1-3; A Purpose For Pain? I. Trials Teach Endurance II. Trials Teach Humility III. Trials Produce Hope IV. Trials Prepare for Service

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, pain is usually something that we avoid at all costs. No one enjoys the prick of a thorn in their hand or the sting of a thistle in their foot. But pain has its place and purpose- for example- pain is often a part of the breaking and healing process. Pain also is useful in that it warns us of danger. Pain is good if that pain is the first line of defense against greater injury. No one wants to have your hand numb when brought close to a fire. Pain tells you to remove your hand! There are various forms of suffering and pain that we experience in this life. There is physical pain and suffering- caused by sickness or injury. There is spiritual turmoil caused by sin or temptation. There is emotional, relational and phycological pain caused by various situations and struggles. Sometimes we suffer because we are people of faith- as Job did when tempted by his wife and attacked by the Devil. But other times, we suffer because of sin. Either by our own sin or the sins of others- and the consequences that this sin brings. Most of us have memorized Rom. 8 where we are assured that God works all things together for the good of those who love Him- but have you ever considered what that good end might be? We know that God is works all to His glory- but all things work tougher for my good?! What good- what end benefit and blessing does God have in mind when He directs our path through the valley of the shadow of death? Well, today we are going to look at a few purposes that God may have in mind- or a few good end results of trial and pain. As a congregation, there has been a lot of sorrow, suffering and trials that many have and are enduring. So the theme of this sermon is this: Jesus Christ works in and through trials to produce good fruit in His people. Since we are going to look at 4 purposes, some of our points will be brief.

**I. Trials Teach Endurance**

In our first point, we find that Jesus uses trials to teach us endurance. As we read in Rom. 5:3- suffering produces endurance. Endurance here is the trait of a marathon runner. Trials have a way of flexing our muscles of faith- so that we can run the race with endurance. That we would stand the test of time. We confess that God preserves those whom He has called. We believe in the perseverance of the saints. But did you know that God uses trials to preserve us- to teach us to endure! Hardship and tribulation are used to keep us on the narrow road- to keep us fighting the good fight! We can be straying off the path- or falling asleep on the side of the road- but trials get us going again! Paul puts it like this in Heb. 10:36- you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. So trails keep us from shrinking back- from falling down and growing slack. Now this might seem to go against our expectation. If someone is running and they face resistance- lets say that they get to the bottom of a hill and suddenly the wind picks up against them and it starts to rain. Will a marathon runner give up when they face resistance? Will they simply throw in the towel and stop running because they faced this trial? Well, the Bible teaches that this trial is the very thing that keeps them running! They see the obstacle and they know that God is still in control- and that there must be some good reason for this trial- so they keep on putting one foot in front of the other. Remember that back in our reading from Rom. 5 we found that we can rejoice in our suffering- because suffering produces endurance! So if we know that this trial is being used by God to keep us fighting, walking, running and remaining- then we can even be glad that God sent this trial! So adversity has a way of sobering us- maturing us- teaching us consistency! To be constant and steadfast in our faith- forcing us to take a long-term view of our life and walk with the Lord. Flexing the muscles of our faith today so that we can be ready for the trial we may face tomorrow. So trails teach us endurance, steadfastness and perseverance!

**II. Trials Teach Humility**

But more than that, trials are also used by God to teach us humility. The trial itself teaches us that we can do it all on our own, but rather we need to lean upon the strong arm of the Lord to protect and provide. In our earlier reading we saw in Dt. 8 that one of the reasons that God lead the Israelites into the wilderness was to teach them humility! Dt. 8:2- the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might mumble you, testing what was in your heart. So humility is the desired result that God is working through the trial! Imagine- 40 years of wandering in the desert because the people were proud, complaining and rebellious in heart. The trial of the desert taught them humility- that they might remember that they depend on God for everything- that we do not live by the strength of our own hand! Bread and water came from the Lord- He gave them manna from heaven and water from the rock to teach the Israelites to have a humble dependence on Him alone! For when we are weak, then our God is strong! Trials teach us our need- how we are completely dependent on Him! God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble as I Peter 5 put it! Trials teach us to cloth ourselves with humility! How many of us have not cried out in the trial- in a time of need- O Lord, I can’t do this! How many of us have not been brought to an end of ourselves- I can’t fix this Lord- I don’t know what to do or how this is going to work out! And yet- as you cried out for strength God was teaching you that you need strength! That He alone is a fortress and strong tower- that we can run to Him and be saved! So the trial drives pride and self-reliance far from our hearts. I don’t have the answers- I don’t know what to do. We learn to lean not on our own understanding as Prov. 3 puts it- trials drive us from our own wisdom and drives us to the arms of our Loving Father! Tribulation awakens our need- and forces us to depend on Him alone! Even as Jesus said in John 15- apart from me you can do nothing! So it is, that in times of trials we feel our need the most clearly! I can’t change this- I can’t fix this- I have no strength in myself! So Lord, help me, heal me, strengthen me, save me!

**III. Trials Produce Hope**

But as important as humility is- learning to give up hope in yourself- it is equally important that you turn to someone else for strength! So trials produce humility but also hope! As we learn to doubt our own resources- we also learn to see the sufficiency of our God! As our text in Rom. 5:4 continues- suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope! Hope in what? Well, it is a hope for the future! Hope in whom? It is clearly a hope in God! In other words, trials enable us to change our focus- to lift our eyes from the grounds and cast them upon the Lord who dwells in the highest heavens! Trials have a way of taking away things of this world in order to teach us what we should really love! Trials are the pruning work of God- to make us more fruitful and faithful. To strengthen our faith and stir our hope in the future! So trails change our focus. What are we living for- what are we seeking- where do we look for help- what is our comfort in this life? Well, do we look for positions, success, reputation, ease, worldly comfort, physical strength, the presence of family or friend? All of these can be taken away. So what is left? What is your only, lasting and enduring comfort? What is your comfort for body and soul in life and in death? Trials force us to ask and answer this question. From where do you find help, purpose, meaning, and joy? It can only be in our belonging to a faithful savior! So it is that the friction of trial forces us to let go of these worldly desires and earthly pleasures so that our empty hands can cling to the hope of a God who saves and grants entrance into eternal glory! And this hope does not put to shame- this hope will not let us down! No one who looks to God’s hand in hope- in the confidence of faith- will be disappointed! As we start to look to the future- as our gaze shifts from earth to heaven- hope stirs within! An expectation of receiving what has been promised starts to cheer our hearts. Trials produce hope that creates a desire for better things to come- as we look forward by faith.

**IV. Trials Prepare for Service**

There is still one more result of trial- one more fruit of tribulation that we have to consider. Trials are used by God to prepare us for service. Let’s read from II Cor. 1:3-5. Here we find that trials are used by God to prepare us to serve others. As God comforts us in our trials- we are enabled to be a source of comfort to others when they face trials. I know that some of you here have witness this. When you face trials and tribulations in your life and you see God bring you through that trial- you are comforted. But in God’s providence, someone is brought into your life who walks the same road after you. Someone else is walking the path of tribulation- walking in your footsteps if you will. God then gives you a unique opportunity to encourage- bless- and comfort this fellow believer. If you had not first gone through that trial- you would not have been as equipped to be a messenger of peace and encouragement! But as it is, the trial that you first endured equipped you to be a herald of comfort to one who walks through the valley after you! You see the wonder of it all. Not only does God do a good work in you through the trial- giving you hope, endurance and character. He also uses you to be a blessing- to do good to others! You become the instrument of His comfort- as you comfort others with the comfort you yourself have already received! When people can see God keeping and holding you through the trial- they are enabled- strengthened to stand firm in the trial they now face! They are assured- you are not alone! God did not abandon me and He will not abandon you we can say! Our experience ministers God’s comfort to others. Seeing runners on the track stirs our hearts. Hearing the encouragement from those who finished their trek through the trial encourages those in the trial to persevere! I know it may seem hard to believe now- but it may be that God is sending you a trial today to prepare you to be a comforter to someone else tomorrow. In this way, we are made to be more like Christ. As Paul continues in II Cor. 1:5- we share in Christ’s suffering so that we can share in His comfort as well. Trials conform us to the image of Christ- in both the suffering of today and in the comfort of tomorrow. Trials sanctify us- burning away the impurity of the flesh so that we look more like Christ and as we are being prepared to meet Him. We can take up our cross and follow Christ- know that this suffering will give way to comfort and glory!

As we close, suffering has a way of opening our eyes. We see the little idols of the heart- we see the brevity of life and the hope of a lasting future. Trials can be a time of reflection and spiritual growth. These can sober the immature and stir those who are sleeping! Jesus Christ works in and through trials to produce good fruit in His people. A few of these good fruit are steadfastness, character and hope- as well as preparing us for service and making us more like Christ. When we learn to see the reason behind the trial- we can begin to have joy- even rejoicing in the trial as Paul says. Not a sadistic pleasure in the pain- but rather a joyful expectation of the good God is doing through and with the trial. In this way we can kiss the hand that disciplines- knowing that it is received from a loving Father.