The Results of Our Tribulations

Turn in your Bibles to Romans 5 again, as that is where we will spend most of our time today. I wanted to have the James passage read because it is so similar to this particular part of chapter 5 that we are dealing with now, and we'll get into that passage a little later as well. It is a good idea to study other passages of Scripture that speak of similar ideas to get a better grasp of the words and how they are used in different contexts. This gives us a more complete understanding of what we are dealing with. Another item that we came across in the James passage is that it is written to Jewish Christians, as denoted by the use of the term διασπορά. These are Jews who were living outside of Israel, and they are still referred to by this term in Israel. I read an article in the Jerusalem Post this week that used this. This is the kind of thing that you need to be aware of when studying the Bible, the context is extremely important, and knowing the audience is a part of the context, knowing what the author intended to convey to the original audience is a major part of the context as well. Knowing to whom the author was speaking and their cultural setting and history are all important aspects of the context in which the passage was written. Studying the Bible isn't just reading the words on the page and trying to find out what it means to you. That makes it completely subjective, and the Word of God is objective. It is the truth, and it is sharper than a two-edged sword, For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two- edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Hebrews 4:12. Keep in mind that this does not mean that the Word changes. It is alive and active, but it is not evolving, it does not change. This is just like Jesus Christ Himself, whom John referred to as "the Word" in John 1. He is alive, but He is not changing. He is the same today as He was in the past, and as He will be in the future. The Word of God is like that, it is alive, but it is unchanging, it had one meaning when it was written, it has one meaning when we read it today, and it will have one meaning in the future. The Word is alive and able to conform us to His image, but it does not evolve and change. This principle makes it so that we can rely on God's Word. If He doesn't have a fixed purpose, and a fixed meaning to the words that He gives us then we are left to be the authority over the meaning of His Word. That, of course, is very dangerous territory for sinful man to be treading on. We need to let the Word speak for itself, and then apply it to our lives, and that is what we will try to do today.

So, turn to Romans 5, and I'll read verses 3-5. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; 4 and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; 5 and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. There are definitely some inspiring words in that passage. We have tribulation, perseverance, proven character, and then we see the word hope again.

Let's pray

Introduction

I love inspiring stories. True stories of people's grit and determination to carry on in the face of danger or disappointment have helped me throughout life when times are tough, or things just aren't going the way that I think they should. Foxe's Book of Martyrs is a great resource to find stories of people carrying on in the face of tremendous persecution. The determination to stand for what is right and true depicted in that book should inspire all of us to carry on in our light and momentary trials. G A Henty books are another resource for inspiring stories that depict people doing the right thing when they are being mistreated. They are primarily for young people, but they contain incredible detail about historic events and the hero of the story is actually heroic. This is unlike many contemporary stories where the so-called hero is difficult to distinguish from the villain. This is not so in Henty's stories, where the good guy is always the good guy, and the bad guy is always the bad guy. But, to me anyway, the most inspiring true story of carrying on in the face of persecution and trials is the apostle Paul. What an amazing man he was. The list of his sufferings is in 2 Corinthians 11, and it is an incredible account of suffering for the cause of Christ. Are they (speaking of the false teachers) servants of Christ? —I speak as if insane —I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. 24 Five times I received from the Jews thirty- nine lashes. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. 26 I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; 27 I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28 Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. 29 Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense **concern?** What a list. If anyone is qualified to talk about tribulations and their purpose in our lives, it is the apostle Paul. When we think of a theologian today, we probably conjure up an image of an older professorly looking man who's kind of soft, always sitting behind a desk, basically, someone who is really smart, but physically weak. That was not Paul! He was an adventurer, not reckless, but not a coward either. He was not soft; his back was hardened by the whip. Can you imagine what his back looked like after receiving 39 lashes 5 times? He was beaten with rods 3 times, and stoned and left for dead! You can read about that in Acts 14. Paul did not despair in the midst of these trials, but rather he rejoiced in them, and today we will get a glimpse as to why he would do such a seemingly contradictory thing. We are going to see the purpose behind our tribulations, how are tribulations should lead to hope, and that we have a hope that does not disappoint.

The Purpose of Tribulations

Why do bad things happen to good people? This is a question that has been asked throughout the centuries, and is not an easy one to answer. There is tragedy all around us, which we can read about everyday in the news. Just this past week I read about a nine-year-old boy who was killed in the storm on the east coast when a tree blew over on him as he went out to check on the family's newborn calves. A woman in New York had her two children taken out of her arms by the rushing waters, never to be seen again. A

tsunami that kills hundreds of thousands of people, earthquakes that do the same, fires, tornadoes, the list is seemingly endless. And, those are so-called natural disasters, they don't include the man-made disasters of sin, like murder, stealing, lying, and divorce, again the list is endless. Why is there so much evil in the world? Well, if ever there were a person who experienced both the natural disasters, and the man-made disasters of life on earth, it was Paul. You see both in the list from 2 Corinthians. Paul did not lament his circumstances, or ask to be taken out of this world, but he did long for the next life, and we will see why that was, and perhaps shed a little bit of light on why Christians suffer some of the things that they do.

So, Romans 5:3 we see starts with the phrase, "And not only this." Just like the therefore that started the chapter, this points back to what came before. If you remember, we have three automatic blessings just by virtue of being justified that we saw in verses 1 and 2. We saw, of course, that we are justified, or set right with God, by putting our faith in Christ. This was the whole point of the first 4 chapters of the book. We saw that on account of being justified we have peace with God. This is peace that is given to us by God. Just like we do not do any good works to be saved, we do not do anything to earn this peace, it is given to us as we unconditionally surrender to God, and His offer of salvation. We also saw how we now have access to God through being justified by Christ. This word for access was used by Greek historians to describe a piece of land that allowed access from the sea. This is a great word picture for the access we have to God in Christ. Typically, the beach that troops use to access the land is quite small relative to the whole place where they are going. Think of the size of the Normandy beaches in relation to all of Europe, or even just France. It is a very narrow passageway. And that is just what we have through Christ to God the Father. Jesus said that He was the Way, the Truth and the Life, and no man comes unto the Father but by Him. This is the access that we have, a very narrow way that leads to a great expanse of blessings from God in heaven. The third automatic blessing we talked about last week is the hope that we have in the future. Remember that this isn't a verb; we aren't hoping that something good will happen. Something good is going to happen in the future if we have been justified by Christ. This is our hope. We have the promise of deliverance from this world, and a future with God, and this we will see a little bit more of today.

And not only this, but we exult in our tribulations. Last time we saw that we exult in the hope of the glory of God. What God has done for us, and the future that we have with Him is so great that we can brag about it to other people. Well, here Paul continues the thought and he says something that seems crazy to the rest of the world, and sometimes it seems crazy to us. Here, Paul says that we boast about, or rejoice in our tribulations. This seems completely counterintuitive to us, as many times we just want to feel sorry for ourselves, and lament the horrible situation that God has us in. That is not at all what Paul is saying here though, and that is not at all what he did in his life. One of the three times that Paul was beaten we find in Acts 16. This is the first time that he had set foot into Europe during his second missionary journey. Paul and Silas went to Philippi first and there met with some of the Jewish people, of whom one was Lydia, who became the first Christian convert in Europe. Right after this Paul rebuked a spirit of divination that had indwelled a slave girl, which made her master very upset. A riot ensued in the town after the people were stirred up against Paul, and he and Silas were taken before the magistrates where they were summarily beaten for causing the

disturbance, and then thrown into jail. Now, I don't know about you, but my first reaction would have been one of confession to the Lord for not obeying what He wanted me to do. Obviously, this was not the Lord's plan, I mean we just got hauled before the magistrates, beaten and thrown in jail. We should have just stayed in Asia. Maybe, we should pray for deliverance from this situation? If you get us out of here Lord, we will go straight back to Asia. Please get us out of here Lord. But that is not Paul's reaction, not even close. We see what he and Silas did in Acts 16:25. But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were **listening to them.** About midnight Paul and Silas were praising God and singing hymns. Can you imagine? What must the other prisoners have been thinking? Now I would imagine that most of the other men there would have been like the men in jail today, not the most pleasant crowd to preach to. But, Paul and Silas were exulting in their tribulations, and we see the result in verses 26-31. and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. 27 When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!" 29 And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, 30 and after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." And of course, the jailer believed, and his whole household. So, Paul did not lament his circumstance and just ask for deliverance. He and Silas were praying and praising the Lord, so much so, that the jailer rushed into them and asked how he could be saved. Paul was exulting in his tribulations here and the result was that the jailer and his whole household were saved. Paul was completely focused on Christ in his life, and desiring for His will to be done, note his own will. This is why he could rejoice in such a seemingly miserable situation. He knew that it was God's will to deliver the girl from the evil spirit, and so it must be God's will that he be in the jail, and obviously it was, since the Word went out and people were saved. Paul had absolute faith in the Lord in all situations, and it showed in his exulting in his tribulations. When the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write Romans 8:28 he may have been thinking about this incident. It says there that And we know that God causes all things to work together for good for those who are called according to His purpose. That means all things, not just the good things.

Sometimes our suffering may seem pointless, though. We aren't typically thrown in jail for witnessing, and then stay up late into the night praying and singing with our good friend, when suddenly an earthquake hits, and the jailer rushes in and asks us how to be saved. Our lives are usually a little more mundane, but we still have trials, tribulations, and sometimes down right suffering. What then, how do we deal with that? We see that in the rest of the verse.

And not only this, we exult in our tribulations, knowing tribulation brings about perseverance

We need to keep something in mind when things are tough, and we are suffering. It is for a purpose. In the life of the Christian, there really is no such thing as needless, or

pointless suffering. The thing that we need to keep in mind while we have some trial is that it is causing us to grow, spiritually. Another aspect that I think is helpful is the way that Paul makes this statement. He just says "we exult in our tribulations." He doesn't say, if we have tribulations, then we rejoice. He says that we rejoice in our tribulations like they are a foregone conclusion. We will have tribulations; God does not save us into a perfect life without any troubles. So, we need to realize this going forward or we will have a pretty miserable existence wondering why everything isn't perfect. The first word that points to this in the verse is "knowing". We need to be in the state of knowing that we are going to have trials and that they are for a purpose, and that purpose is developing perseverance. Knowing is in the perfect tense, so it is a completed action in which the result is being experienced now. So, we should have this settled ahead of the trial, that this is to develop perseverance. As a Christian, if we don't already have this idea settled in our mind, we should. The trials of life are inevitable, and we see here that they are for a purpose, no matter what it may seem like when you are in the midst of the trial. So, get this straight in your mind now, ahead of the trial; when the trial comes know that it is for your spiritual growth.

The next word we come to that shows this inevitability is "brings about", κατεργάζεται in the Greek. Now this is in the present tense, which means it is doing it right now. And, it is in the third person, so essentially it says "the tribulation, it brings about perseverance." The tribulation is causing the perseverance to develop. This word was used earlier in the book as well in Romans 4:15, when it says that the Law "brings about" wrath. That was automatic, the law just brings wrath to people because they are incapable of following the Law. Well, here we have the same word saying that trials "bring about" perseverance, it just happens. We develop perseverance while in a trial.

This word, perseverance, is one that I love. It is just an intense word that says so much, and conjures images of people like Sir Edmund Hillary climbing to the top of Mt Everest, or William Tyndale holding to his Christian faith even when being burned at the stake, or the story of Ahn Sook, a Korean persecuted by the Japanese in WW2 for being a Christian, or Corrie Ten Boom, the list is endless of inspiring stories of Christians who showed immense perseverance in the face of severe persecution. To me, the most inspiring stories are ones that the main character shows perseverance. Perseverance is steadfastness in doing something despite difficulty or delay in achieving success according to the New Oxford American Dictionary. And that is what Paul says here is brought about by going through trials. Developing perseverance is one of the reasons that the military has things like boot camp, and the more elite the soldier is, the tougher the training program is to get into the group. The Navy Seals, for example, go through six months of training before they prove that they have what it takes to be called a Seal. Their months and months of training develops perseverance so that they can withstand the rigors of combat, and still accomplish their mission. They train, or go through trials, to prepare their minds and bodies to do things like fly into a foreign country and find the most wanted man in the world, take care of business, and then get back out of the country without taking a single casualty. They do amazing things because of the perseverance that they develop through intense, focused training. And they know what the goal is when they are going through the training. They aren't just punishing themselves for months at a time without any purpose in mind. They know that the training will bring

about the ability to withstand combat. We should know that our trials bring about perseverance, they give us the ability to withstand the rigors of spiritual combat.

Knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; 4 and perseverance, proven character. Character is another great word that means so much. The saying goes that a picture is worth a thousand words. Well, some words are worth a thousand words. Like perseverance and character. Character is doing the right thing, no matter what. William Tyndale is a great example of both of these words, perseverance and character. He persevered in translating and copying the Bible into English in spite of being turned down by the religious rulers in England. He went to Europe and secretly continued his work, ultimately smuggling thousands of Bibles back into England. He was eventually betrayed by a person who pretended to be his friend and subsequently captured. But, it was here that he was able to display the character that was produced while he was going through the trial of being pursued around Europe for doing the Lord's work. He did not recant his beliefs, or bemoan his horrible circumstance when he was arrested and threatened with death. He eventually was brought to the stake and put to death while never wavering in his commitment to the Lord, and what was right. This is character, and it is developed through perseverance in trial.

It's worth looking at James 1 again to see this in another context as it gives a little more detail. You can turn to James 1, and I'll read verses 2-4, Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. These two passages, Romans 5:3-4 and James 1:2-4 are actually quite similar, but the results of the trials are put a little more bluntly here. Here, James says that we are to consider it all joy when we have trials. This is basically the same as what Paul says when he says that we are to exult in our tribulations. The way that James says "consider it" shows that he means for his audience to have this settled in their minds ahead of time, they need to have this realization going into the trial, knowing that the trial produces endurance. Here we see the word that is translated "produces" is κατεργάζεται, just like the *brings about* in Romans 5. So, the trials bring about endurance, and endurance is the same Greek word translated as perseverance in Romans. Verse 4 is where James gets a little more specific than Paul does though. We see that we are to let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. We are to *let* endurance have its perfect result. This implies submitting to the trial. It reminds me of a child who does not submit to the discipline of his parents. Kind of like the story of the kid who is told to sit down by his parent, and he reluctantly sits but says to himself, "I'm sitting on the outside, but I'm standing on the inside!" This is not the attitude that we should have when going through trials. We need to go into them knowing ahead of time that they are for a purpose, and that is to make us more complete, James says here. Now, what exactly does James mean by "perfect and complete?" Literally the word perfect means to be "fullgrown", or "mature", and the word complete means to have "integrity", to be "whole, complete, without damage, blameless." So, the trials should lead to us having endurance, or withstanding hard times with steadfastness, which leads to us being mature Christians who have integrity. Wow, now that is a goal that we should all attain to. It should be all of our heart's desire to be mature people with integrity. Or, as Paul puts it, people with "proven character".

Hebrews 12 is another good place to go to see why we suffer, and it is here that we see where Paul is headed when he says that proven character leads to hope. Hebrews-James, turn back just a few pages to Hebrews 12:7-11 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. 11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. It is for discipline that we endure. Our trials are like training; they are the boot camp of life. Here the author of Hebrews says that our trials are from God, and He is disciplining us like His children so that the trials would enable us to share His holiness and yield the peaceful fruit of righteousness. Parents don't just discipline their children so that they become obedient robots who do precisely what they are told, at least that shouldn't be the goal. As a parent our goal in disciplining our children should be their holiness, or correct behavior before the Lord. The ultimate goal of disciplining your child should be so that when the child grows into an adult he obeys the Lord. And that is precisely why God allows us to suffer trials. He wants us to have steadfastness and develop proven character; He wants us to develop into people who will do the right thing no matter what. He wants us to be more holy, and being more holy is the result of having good character, which is developed through perseverance in trials.

Now, this is a good place to be reminded of where Paul is headed in chapter 5. We saw last time that we are transitioning from being saved or justification, to living our lives for the Lord, or sanctification. It is here that Paul is beginning to talk about holy living, and we see that that is really the ultimate purpose of the trials that we go through, they are to make us more Christ-like. Like it says in Hebrews, "He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share in His holiness." It is a cycle that Paul is going to discuss more in chapters 6 and 7, but we see it foreshadowed here, in that our trials should make us more holy, like Hebrews says, or a mature Christian with integrity like James says, or give us hope like Paul says in Romans 5. Here is the cycle, we are put in a trial, we persevere, we develop character, or integrity, or holiness as a result of the trial, but then we realize that we still have our sin nature, and that should cause us to realize that we have a glorious future, when we will no longer be encumbered with our sinful bodies.

So, ultimately we are put into the trials to make us realize that we have a future in the presence of the holy God. And this should cause us to long to be with Him, and away from this world. Clearly, Christ does not want us to be enamored with this world. 1 John 2:15 makes this abundantly clear, **Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.** Our trials should show us that this world does not have anything for us; they should show us that the sinful state of things on earth is nowhere that we should want to be. In fact, that verse says that if we love the world, the love of the Father is not in us. If we love it here, then we don't love the Father. God is trying to lovingly discipline us in trials to bring us to obedience to Him, and drive us away from the sinful world. This is just like a parent who disciplines

her child not to touch the hot stove so they do not get burned. God gives us trials so that we learn to obey Him, and trust Him, and ultimately be more like Him.

Now, I quickly want to move on to verse 5 back in Romans 5 because this is such a critical part of the whole process that Paul is discussing here. We don't just hold out under trial by means of self-discipline. If we did, we would all be in trouble. We don't do these things in our own strength. We aren't saved by our good works; it is God who justifies us. We don't conjure up the peace with God in our own hearts; God makes the peace with us. Well, we don't just persevere and develop character in our trials on our own either. Verse 5 says and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. This verse is just packed with so much truth that it is a shame to go over it too quickly, but I'll give it a try. The first thing we see is that our hope does not disappoint. The future that we have with God will not disappoint. If our hope is in God we will not be let down. The God and creator of the universe will not let down His people, if our hope is in Him we will be satisfied, that is pretty much the message of the entire Bible. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15 that if the things that we as Christians claim to be true are not true, then we are to be pitied above all men. What a sorry lot we are, if none of this is true. But, we have an absolute guarantee that these things are true, and we find it right here in verse 5. Because the love of God has been poured out. Now, this word for love here is $\dot{\alpha}$ γάπε. We are probably all familiar with that, but there is an interesting thing about this word that goes along with what Paul is talking about here. This word is not only used to express love, but it can also be used to denote a "love feast". We have seen that our trials should cause us to hope for the future, they should cause us to see the hope that we have in the Lord, and here we see that the love of God has been poured out. Well, the book of Revelation says that in the future God is planning a love feast for those who have been justified by Christ. Revelation 19 is a beautiful picture of this, and it talks about the righteous character of those invited to this love feast. Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb (that's Christ, he is the lamb) has come and His bride (that's us, we are the bride of Christ) has made herself ready." 8 It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. (the righteous acts that we did by becoming more holy as a result of the trials that we go through on this earth) 9 Then he *said to me, " Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. There is a lot in that passage, of course. It's really hard to just jump into Revelation and pull things out, but I just wanted you to see the love feast that God has planned for His people, and what a great hope we have in Christ.

"Has been poured out" is another one of those interesting words that is all one word in the Greek. It shows that this is a completed action, God has already poured out His love for us. And notice that the love of God has been poured out within our hearts. The heart of course, here is talking about the inner being of the person. When we are justified by faith, God graciously pours out His love into our hearts. This is what allows us to know Him, and to learn to be more like Him, and to want to serve Him with our lives. We don't do all these things in our own strength. We do them through Christ, like Paul says in Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. Since we have the all-powerful love of God within our hearts, we are empowered to follow after

Him, to pick up our crosses and follow Him wherever He leads, through whatever trials He brings our way.

God doesn't leave us without a guarantee. Because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. Christ promised the disciples that He would send the comforter, or helper in the NASB, after He went to heaven. John 14:16 says I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; 17 that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. So, the guarantee that we have from God that we have a future with Him is the fact that He has given us the Holy Spirit. And we see in the John passage that the world does not have the Holy Spirit, only those who put their faith in Christ, or know Him, will have the Holy Spirit. A major part of the John 14 passage is that Jesus is going to leave, but He tells the disciples not to worry, because if He leaves, He will come back for them. The chapter starts with this idea, **Do not let** your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. 3 If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. Jesus tells His disciples not to worry because He will come for them again. This is in the future that He is talking about coming back for them. But, in the mean time He is going to give them the Holy Spirit as a down payment on the fact of His return. Christ is telling His disciples that He is going to leave them for a time, but He is going to give them the Holy Spirit, until He comes again to take them to heaven, and the place that He is going to prepare for them. What a glorious hope it is that we have. The hope that we have is the fact that Christ is in heaven now preparing a place for us, and that He will come again to take us back there with Him, and, not only do we have this hope, but we have the guarantee of it through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Conclusion

When I came to this section in studying for the message I thought that I would get a lot further than we have. It is easy to just breeze over this section and try to get to some of the deeper theological truths that are here. But, this question of suffering and trials is so pertinent to our daily lives that it quickly became apparent that these three verses are here for a reason. Remember, Paul is moving on from just being saved to being a person who can be used by the Lord. It is no accident that Paul answers this question immediately after telling people how to be saved. It is almost like a warning. After you've been saved life is not going to be perfect, you are going to have trials, but persevere, they are for your own good. Well, before a soldier can be used by his commanders he has to be trained. He has to learn how to use his weapons, he has to learn the tactics that his side will use in battle, he has to learn the tactics that his enemies will use so that their weaknesses can be exploited, and, importantly, he has to be hardened for battle by making his body physically tough. Make no mistake folks, we are in a battle. Paul says in Ephesians 6 that we don't just battle against flesh and blood, but we struggle against the Devil and his minions, spiritual forces of evil. We are in a spiritual battle that is as horrible as any warfare that has ever been fought on the earth. We are in a battle for our very souls. Jesus said that we aren't to fear those who can take our lives, but we are

to fear the one who can destroy our soul. This is the kind of warfare that God is preparing us for by putting us through trials here on the earth. He is training us to be His good soldiers, who are capable of carrying out any mission that He wants to send us on. Keep in mind that the most elite soldiers have the toughest training. Is that true for us as well? When we are going through the hardest trials of life, do we treat it like we are going through the toughest possible training regimen, so that we can be the most elite soldier for Christ that we can be? Or do we bemoan our circumstances, feel sorry for ourselves, and want to quit? I've been on both sides of the fence in this during my lifetime. I can assure you that it is much more spiritually profitable to take the trials like the apostle Paul did, and rejoice in them, look for the purpose that God has in the trial, learn from it, and then pass on what you learn to others. This is exactly what happened in the Philippian jail on the night Paul and Silas were there. They had experienced a horrible trial, but they endured the suffering like good soldiers for Christ, they told others about what the Lord was doing, and those people believed in the very God who can save our souls. It is a tremendous privilege to be in the family of God, and we should realize that the trials of life are God the Father disciplining us in order to change us into the people that He wants us to be.