

Solid Gold

To the Romans..., Pt. 11

Good morning everyone. As we get started today I'd like to do a little exercise for which I need *everyone* to participate – you watching at home as well. I need for everyone to stretch out your arms in front of you. Now, turn your hands to face you. Look at them. Look at them. Happy Palm Sunday, everyone! Ah, when dad jokes and pastor jokes meet, the world will be healed!

It is Palm Sunday, the day that reminds us of when Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey and everyone cheered him. And of course, just a few days later those same throngs *jeered* him. And he was cruelly and unjustly crucified on the day that we – ironically – have come to call Good Friday. And it *was* good...for us. Because of what the cross means. And so we are talking for two weeks about what the cross means. And we're doing so out of the book of Romans that we have been studying all year.

So we're going to read today from Romans chapter 5 which is the same passage as last week, only whereas last week we looked more at the *latter* part of the passage, this week we're looking more at the *earlier* part. I'm going to read from **Romans 5:1–10**. And

while we're reading, count how many times the word "justified" appears.

1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 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. 3 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope.

5 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. 6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die.

8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! 10 For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

Ok, did you count? The word “justified” shows up twice in this passage, and we looked at it a little bit last week. In the very beginning it says we’re “justified through faith.” Here at the end it says we’re “justified by his blood.” And as we alluded to last week, the doctrine, the teaching, that we can be justified by faith through Jesus’ blood is one of the articles on which the church stands or falls.

I realized that last week I dropped some untranslated Latin on you – that’s not appropriate. The Baptists thought I was being elitist, the Pentecostals thought I was speaking in tongues. So let me translate it this week. When the great reformer, Martin Luther, finally understood this concept from reading Romans, he cried out in Latin – he was a monk after all - “*Simul justus et peccator.*” He realized that when you believe in Christ - at the moment you believe - *simul justus et peccator*, I am simultaneously just - righteous in God’s sight – *and* a sinner. That’s the heart of the gospel. We’ve talked about it so many times in this series in Romans.

And appropriately so, because that’s one of the great planks, if not *the* center, of the Christian faith. Therefore, when Paul uses these little words in the beginning of v.3, when he says, “*Not only so...*” he shows that what he’s about to tell us is something practically as great as that.

In other words, he says, “And not only that...” You don’t say that unless what you’re about to tell people is *every bit* as good as what was just mentioned.

Now if justification by faith is everything...what comes next must be incredible. And it is. And what Paul tells us is something the Bible says many, many times, in many ways, in many places. He says, (v.3) “*Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings ...*” This is one of the key ways to know you’re a Christian. To know that you are *growing* as a Christian. Christians are given a unique ability. We rejoice in our sufferings.

Jesus actually has a whole parable based on that; the parable of the four soils. And it talks about how there are four different kinds of people, and most of them *act* like they believe. They act like they profess faith, that they believe in God, and yet, if you remember the parable, one of the soils consists of people who spring up, they receive the Word with joy, but when trials and troubles and suffering come they give up. The sufferings are like weeds that choke out the good grass.

And so what Paul is trying to say here, and what the Bible says throughout, is the ability to rejoice in suffering is not only a wonderful gift of Christian faith, but it's also a test of your Christian faith. Now, as a pastor, I talk to many, many, many people in the midst of suffering. I talk to *modern* people of course, because I don't have any unfrozen cavemen coming to me for advice. But as a historical theologian, I do deal with people from the past – not in person, but through *reading* history and biographies and such. And I can tell you this, it's clear that people in the past were much, much more willing to accept the idea of suffering than modern folk.

For example, it was normal for a woman to figure, “If I'm going to have eight children, I'm not going to see all of them grow up. I'm going to lose some of them.” I'm not saying they didn't grieve, but it was expected - there was a different worldview. Today the first thing we think is, “Who can I sue?” Because bad things aren't supposed to happen. The average person today, when they come up against suffering, feels like, “This isn't right. Life isn't supposed to be this way. I don't deserve it. This isn't fair. This makes my life meaningless – not worth living.”

Now do you see why this is such a test in the Bible? If your worldview – your view of the nature of life and the nature of reality - can't handle life as it is...it must be a *flawed* view. Your theories of what life

should be like, your theories of what you deserve, your theories of what people are like and what the nature of reality is like...If *when* you suffer you're shattered, it proves your view of things must be superficial because, otherwise, it cannot account for reality, and it can't handle life as it is. That's the reason why it's such a test.

The Bible says Christians should have a unique ability. They can rejoice *in* their sufferings. Now that's what we're going to look at here today. What does it mean to rejoice in your sufferings? There are many other passages in the Bible to explain it. This is one of the better ones, one of the more complete ones. And so let's deal with it under these three headings: First, what rejoicing in suffering *is not* – sometimes the easiest way to explain the positive is to first rule out the negative; secondly, what rejoicing in suffering *is* - what Paul is actually talking about - and, thirdly, *how does rejoicing in suffering happen?* How does it work?

First, what he's *not* talking about, **What rejoicing in suffering is not.** If you look carefully, especially at this little middle word, “We rejoice *in* our suffering,” it shows the Christian understanding of suffering is neither stoicism nor masochism. And this is important because many people have mistaken the Christian approach to suffering for one or the other.

First, it's not stoicism. Paul doesn't say, "We rejoice *even though* we're suffering." What does a stoic do? A stoic says, "Don't let it get to you. Don't let it touch you. Stiff upper lip. Never let them see you sweat. There's no crying in baseball!" *Many* people have thought - tragically - that that's what it means to be a Christian. In fact, I'll tell you, there are some hymns - and I don't want to say you should *never* sing the hymns - but there are some hymns that have been interpreted that way. Some of you grew up singing, "At the Cross." The chorus goes ...

At the cross, at the cross where I first saw the light,
And the burden of my heart rolled away,
It was there by faith I received my sight,
And now I am **happy all the day!**

Now there's a sense in which, of course, that's true because, as Paul says, you can *always* rejoice, but if we're not careful what it lends itself to, and the view many people have taken, is what it means to be a Christian is, though suffering might happen to you, it doesn't really bother you. "Oh, my spouse died, oh well, God has a plan." Like if I cry or appear sad, I'm somehow letting Jesus down. That's not *at all* the Christian approach. That *totally* misses the genius of the Christian approach, as we're going to see.

And of course, it doesn't fit with any of our biblical examples. The most famous one probably being Job. Do you remember when Job was struck down? Physically, his health was gone. His children were all killed. All of his wealth was wiped away. What does it say? It says he ripped his clothes. He shaved his head. He fell to the ground and screamed. And then the text says, **Job 1:22**, "*In all this Job sinned not...*" which means what he did was perfectly consistent with rejoicing in suffering.

And yet there are many, many people - especially in traditional Christian churches - that if they saw somebody doing that, they'd say, "This poor guy is not really walking with Jesus. This poor guy has let it get to him. Christians don't do that sort of thing." Oh, yes they *do*. "In all this Job sinned *not...*"

The problem with stoicism is it has several forms. One form of stoicism is flat denial. You deal with suffering by not admitting how much you're hurting, not admitting it to yourself or to anybody else. Another form of stoicism is where you actually destroy the part of your heart that cares for the thing that's in jeopardy. So you start to say to yourself, "Well, yes, I used to want things like that, but I've grown up now." No matter what you do, stoicism always, always cuts you off from yourself, from your real self.

And you know, one of the worst things about stoicism is it *does* get you through things – it’s not that it doesn’t work, especially in the short run - but when you get through suffering through stoicism and you come upon other people who are collapsing under their own suffering, you will not be compassionate. You’ll say, “Stop blubbering. Pull yourself together. You gotta get tough!” In other words, if you do get through, it’ll make you a hard person. People will not want to come talk to you about their problems. You’ll be very, very harsh when you talk to them. You like to think of yourself as a very strong person – well, rock is very strong. But that’s not Christianity.

But on the other hand, it’s not masochism. See, Paul is not saying, “We rejoice *for* our sufferings.” I’ve had people say, “Oh, I’m suffering. Oh, bad things are happening to me. *Great!* I must *really* be doing something for God!” That’s not what Paul is saying. He says, “A Christian rejoices *in* suffering.” He doesn’t say, “A Christian rejoices *for* suffering.”

A Christian isn’t masochistic, and there are people who, to put it in Cartesian terms, their philosophy of life is, “I suffer; therefore, I am. I have problems; therefore, I’m deep and complicated.” I got an album the other day by *The Cure*, that I used to listen to in high school and think exactly that!

You’re laughing; I know, it is funny. On the other hand, it’s not. There’s another hymn that goes ...

Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen
Nobody knows but Jesus

Do you see the seductiveness of this? “Nobody knows. I’m the only one. My suffering makes me special. Look at me up on this cross!” Yuck. There’s a lot of that going on in certain segments of the American church today and it’s gross. I can yell you having read about Christian martyrs through the centuries, the one thing they *didn’t* have was a martyr’s complex. That’s not what Paul is saying. It doesn’t say, “I rejoice *for* my sufferings.” He doesn’t say, “I rejoice *in spite* of my sufferings.” So what *is* he saying...”

Second, what rejoicing in suffering is. Here’s what he *is* saying. When he says “We rejoice *in* our sufferings...” It’s saying, on the one hand, to be a Christian doesn’t mean we don’t experience grief, that we’re not cast down. Paul says in **2 Corinthians 4:8-9 KJV**, “*We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;*” Christians *are* cast down! Christians *do* experience grief!

Not only that, I believe the word “in” means more than just, “We rejoice *even though* there are sufferings around us.” I believe, that if anything, the gospel actually moves Christians to be *more* touched by grief and the suffering of life in the world than you were before. You’re really *in* suffering. You really *are* cast down. You really *do* rip your clothes and fall to the ground and pour ashes on your head, *but* we have something we can rejoice in, not only *during* suffering, but we have something to rejoice in that actually is *enhanced* by suffering - that we rejoice in it better, that we understand it better. Let me just show you the two sides.

First, Christians really do suffer. They really do experience grief. In fact, in some ways, Christianity actually *enhances* suffering. Think with me for a minute. Look at Jesus. Perfect relationship with his Father, perfect peace, no sin in his heart. And he’s always crying, and he’s always grieving, and he’s always cast down, and he’s always weeping. Why? *Because* he’s perfect.

Think about it. If you walk a perfect person through this world, that person is going to be more *into* grief than the rest of us. And here’s why, the less self-absorbed you are – a perfect person would be focused on others more than on themselves – the more you would be able to see the world as it really is without excuses. You could see how bad so many people in the world have it without having to feel bad that you’re doing well. Most of us are in denial.

Let me give you an example. It’s very interesting. I have a widget on my iPhone that gives me a “Poem of the Day” and one of them this week was by W.H. Auden, who I really like. What I find interesting is that his life is divided in two parts – the first half he was British and a secular humanist, and the second half he became a U.S. citizen and a Christian.

Now, in his early life he had chucked traditional religion and had come to believe that basically there wasn’t really a God, there wasn’t a heaven and hell, and people weren’t sinners. Rather, people just needed to be helped through education and through enlightened government. The world was pretty good and a little secular progress could make it just right. In fact, in the late 1930’s when he moved to New York, he was like many Brit’s, in denial about how bad things were in Europe. This was when appeasing Hitler was the popular option.

Now in his neighborhood on the Upper East Side, there was a movie theatre that he would attend which only showed German movies. Which at that time in history, meant they were showing Third Reich propaganda films. And he attended one explaining what Germany was doing in Poland – this is before the war. And he was kind of buying the logical arguments of the propaganda.

But then, whenever an “enemy of the Fatherland” was shown on the screen, meaning an ethnic Slav or a Jew, the people in the audience – in America! – would begin to shout and yell, “Away with them. Get rid of them.” And when the show was over, Auden couldn’t get up. He had been having a worldview revolution. He was sitting there weeping, and here’s why. He realized that because of his worldview he was not able to admit to himself how bad the world was, how evil human beings could be, and how messed up life really was.

He realized he had been saying to himself, “Well, all it will take is education and good politics.” But he was on the Upper East Side of Manhattan with the most educated and liberal governed people on the planet. And he suddenly realized without a doctrine of sin he couldn’t account for what he had seen. *And* without hope, a hope in a judgment day, a hope in a sovereign God who will one day put all evil down, but who in His justice will also be merciful – the doctrine of the cross – without all that he didn’t have the resources to meet what he saw.

He realized he needed to get back to Christianity or he couldn’t handle life as it was. In fact, he realized he had been repressing. Because of his worldview, he hadn’t been able to *allow* himself to see how hard and bad things were. Do you know why? He didn’t have enough hope to enable his heart to handle what he saw.

I tell you, becoming a Christian, getting a gospel framework, makes you more able to handle grief. In fact, if anything it makes you more able to finally see what’s really out there, able to see what’s wrong with you, what’s wrong with the other people. You *see* the sadness. You don’t have to repress it. You don’t have to say, “Oh, if we just had a good administration in here and we had the right people elected...” Radical evil, radical brokenness. Auden finally understood. He had to go back to Christianity.

You have to have hope to rejoice in in order to really be *in* the suffering. Otherwise, you have to get away from it. You have to wrap your heart around with little luxuries and rationalizations. You can’t see things as they are. What I’m trying to say is Christians grieve *more* than other people. I don’t mean *every* Christian grieves more than every other person. I’m not saying anything like that. The truth is many Christians don’t get this, as we’ve said.

But what I’m trying to say is because we have something to rejoice *in*, we find in our sufferings that we really suffer. We really grieve. We really are cast down. There’s a sense in which Christians have a *capacity* for sadness they didn’t have before. That’s all I’m saying. While we’re dealing with poets, George Herbert – also a Brit, but 300 years before Auden - has a line about Jesus where he says...

My brother, my friend, my Lord and king,
Who makes my joys to weep, and my griefs to sing.

I'll tell you, it's the teaching of Scripture that, when you become a Christian, what God does is takes away your hard heart and gives you a heart of flesh. That's a multifaceted metaphor, but it has to at least mean this; if you have really become a Christian, like your Savior, Jesus, you're going to weep more than you used to. You're going to be willing to be involved more with hurting people than you were before.

You're going to be able to *see* the brokenness of the world and not have to rationalize it away...because you have enough hope to see the reality. By the way, one of the ways I can always tell *men* have really become Christians is they start crying again in a way they haven't since they were about nine. You're *in* suffering. Yeah, Christians suffer, but on the other hand...

The second part of this, the suffering actually enhances your joy. It's not only that you rejoice *during* the suffering, but the suffering *actually* enhances your joy. Now that's weird. Remember, we said very carefully, this isn't masochism. We're not happy *for* our sufferings, but we rejoice *in* our sufferings. What could that possibly mean? It actually is all here. It tells us twice, right before and right after verse 3.

At the end of v.2 it says, "And we rejoice *in the hope of the glory of God.*" Then it says, in v.3-4, "Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, *hope.*" Do you see? It's all laid out in this passage. In verse 6, the hope is because at just the right time Jesus Christ died for us. In verse 5 it says the Holy Spirit pours the knowledge of that on our hearts.

And so when we realize how much he loves us, it's during suffering that the sufferings of Christ mean the most. It's during suffering that we say, "Oh my gosh, I am hurting so badly, and yet this is just a *pinprick* compared to what Jesus suffered for me." And what that does is it enables you to see the beauty of what Jesus did on the cross even more clearly when you're suffering than when you're not. The suffering make hope more vivid.

Now, there's an act of the will involved in this. Why does suffering – some people it makes better and some it makes bitter? Paul says, "suffering produces perseverance" but it doesn't *have* to. You *can* just give up. You can just say, "Woe is me." But if you persevere and you hold onto what Jesus has done, and you *look* at what he has done, and you go back to your roots, and you go back to your resources, you'll find your hope grows, because it's when *you* suffer you understand *Jesus'* sufferings in new ways and his sufferings become more valuable to you than ever. *That's* what it teaches.

Let me give you a couple of illustrations. How does your heater work at home? We're in that season where we almost don't need it - maybe just a little in the morning. But think about it. On the one hand, you can say the heater is warming your home *despite* the cold air, but in another sense, through the thermostat, the heater is warming the home more and more and more *because* of the cold air. Why? The colder the air gets, the more it kicks on the heater.

There's a certain sense in which the heat is fighting against the cold air. But on the other hand, there's another sense in which the heat is actually being *caused* by the cold air. The cold air comes, and the colder it gets, the hotter it gets. Do you see? The colder it gets, the more the thermostat kicks up that heater and the warmer the room gets. And that's *exactly* what we're talking about here.

That's what **1 Peter 1:6** means when it says, "*In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.*" The rejoicing and the suffering are linked. Or that must be what Paul means when he says, (**2 Corinthians 12:10**) "*For when I am weak, then I am strong.*" What does that mean? He says, "When I'm experiencing my weakness, that's the cold air. It drives me to the thermostat - it drives me to see what Jesus has done for me. I flip that switch and the Holy Spirit begins to blow the warm air into my situation. But it doesn't even really kick in until I reach a certain level of cold - of weakness, of suffering.

And the reason it happens to us this way is because that's the way it happened to Jesus. Jesus came to glory through suffering, and that's the reason why suffering and glory are always linked together. It's in our passage; verse 2. "*And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.*" And in verse 3, "... we also rejoice in our sufferings ..." But all through the Bible, you can find this link between suffering and glory.

And it's because Jesus came to glory through suffering, and we're no different. "Not only so ..." says Paul, "but we rejoice *during* our suffering"? No, "We rejoice *in* our sufferings." The suffering, we are more deeply into it because of the gospel, but on the other hand, the suffering actually gets us more deeply into our joy than before. And that's how we grow. So we've said what it is, what it is not, but let's finish up this way...

Third, How does rejoicing in suffering happen?

Now, this is where my thermostat illustration falls down a bit. Because a thermostat is automatic. The cold *automatically* kicks on the heat. Not so in the Christian life. There are some things we have to *do*. We've got to flip the switch. Remember Paul's building list...suffering leads to perseverance and perseverance leads to character...well, no perseverance, no character.

Perseverance is very important. You have to stay put. If you want to rejoice in your suffering, it means you can't panic at the first cool breeze. The word perseverance just means what it looks like. It means you stick with it. For example, start reading the Bible or coming to church or something and the first time something bad happens, you think, "Well, that's enough of that. I guess that didn't work." You have to stick with it. See, you're not going to get the character and the hope unless you go through perseverance. It *doesn't* happen automatically.

So what to we do? Remember again, **v.3** says, "*Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know ...*" That means your knowledge has to be applied. Some of you *don't* know what Paul is saying here. This is new to you. If you don't know it, then when you get into suffering, this isn't going happen. You're not going to find your hope growing. You don't know. You have to *apply* the knowledge. It's not automatic. You have to stay put. There has to be patience, but then character. And the word "character" means to be tested and refined.

We read the verse where Peter says that we rejoice in our suffering, and then in the very next verse he gives this explanation for it, **1 Peter 1:7**, "*These have come...*" – the sufferings, the griefs, "...so that the proven genuineness of your faith—**of greater worth than gold**, which perishes even though **refined by fire**—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed." What Peter is saying there and what Paul is saying here is your troubles should be looked at as a furnace. "Refined by fire" refers to a very specific process.

Speaking of terrible pastor/dad jokes – and I made this one up so it's Nth degrees worse – What did the Wicked Witch of the West say when she turned ore into iron? "I'm smelting, I'm smelting!" Smelting converts a metal ore to it's purest form. By the way, what did the Wicked Witch say we she was offered the choice between a gold nugget and a silver nugget? "Oh, I'll take either ore." That one's mine too!

But when you fish a gold nugget out of a creek in the mountains, you can't just make a ring out of it straightaway. There are all kind of impurities imbedded in that nugget. The impurities are called "dross". But when you put the nugget in a really hot furnace – a smelting oven – it melts it all down and strains out the dross, leaving you with pure gold. Valuable, previous metal.

Ok, let's apply that. If you look at your heart, whether you're a Christian or not, you have all sorts of loyalties, lots and lots of things that are your hopes. You don't just have one. You have *a lot* of them – career, relationships, money, things, titles, degrees, etc. And when you go into a trouble, when you go into the furnace, you find there's only one hope that can handle the sufferings of life. Only one hope will not burn away.

And by the way, dross looks different for everyone. Let me give you an example. Say I'm in a car accident – God forbid! – and the doctor comes into my hospital room and says, “Mr. Scoma we've done all the MRI's and the good news is, you're going to heal up and you'll be able to walk fine, run and jog just fine. But there is one thing...you will never be able to...figure skate.” Am I going to say, “Excuse me, doctor, I need to be alone...?” No, I don't think so. I'll say, “Oh, great!” That's because I'm not a figure skater.

Now, if he says, I'll never be able to *read* again...the point is a trial is not a trial is not a trial. Suffering is not a suffering is not a suffering. It depends on where your hope is. When you go into a furnace, the furnace will always go after you, based on where your hope is. My looks, my smarts, my children...There are all these things that are your hope, and they are radically vulnerable because, if you build your life on those things - and you do - and if you get your identity from those things - and you do - they're radically vulnerable.

In **Colossians 3:3-4**, it says, if you're a Christian, “*Your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, **who is your life**, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*” What that means is if your life is anything but that - if your life is in athletics, if your life is academics, how much money you make, your children, your looks, or whatever - those things are vulnerable. They're not hidden, and they can get clobbered by the circumstances of life, and they will.

And there is only *one* hope. There's only *one* thing on which you can build your life which can never be shaken. It's your love for Christ and his love for you. And that must be your chief hope, your prime hope, your main hope...but until you go through suffering, it's never going to be. It doesn't just happen. You have to go through it.

The other things are good but they shouldn't be *prime*. They're good things. You should love them and like them, but they can't be your hopes. They're too easily shattered. Too easily burned away. And if you go to the smelting oven look for the dross, you will be bitterly disappointed, because it didn't make it through the furnace. And you will come out of your trials a bitter, sour person. Your life ruined.

But the gold remains. And if *that's* what you're looking for, you'll come out of the furnace happy, more compassionate, more full of purpose, and more humbled. It depends on you. Do you *know*? We rejoice in the sufferings because *we know* what God is up to. That through suffering we develop patience. And the patience leads to character. And when the impurities in the character burn away, there's nothing left but hope. The one hope that serves as the foundation for a flourishing life.

And I'll tell you something. A person who has been through the furnace for 10 or 20 years and who has at every point chosen to put Christ first and to hold on...do you know the emotional security? Do you know the poise a person like that has? Because when you build everything on the one thing that cannot be touched or hurt, what a human being you become! What greatness! What glory! That's right. Suffering to glory.

Let's close this way. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Do you know that story? Classic Sunday School. I'll give you the recap. In the book of Daniel these three young men were thrown into a fiery furnace because they wouldn't bow down to the king. When they were thrown into the furnace, it was so hot the guards putting them into the furnace were themselves killed by the heat.

And the great king, who thought he would see them immediately scream and burn, looked down from his safe place high up where he was able to see into the furnace, and saw men walking around inside the furnace - not screaming, not writhing, not burning to ash - but *walking*.

And then he noticed there weren't three; there were four. In absolute astonishment he ran down, and he told them to open the door. He called them out, and the three came out. It was a miracle, but the fourth one never came out. Why not? See, we know who the fourth one was. The king had said, (**Daniel 3:25**) "*He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."*"

And in the book of **Isaiah 43:1-2**, we read, "*But now, this is what the Lord says... "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine...When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze."*" You sang about it this morning. I'm going to ask the band to come up so we can close with it this morning. But what this means is when you go through the furnace, you think about Jesus who went into the furnace for you. And don't forget, when Jesus went into the furnace, God *didn't* go with him. He was forsaken on the cross. He experienced the punishment for sin.

Here's Jesus with the perfect relationship with the Father - perfect intimacy with the Father - and when he was about to step into the furnace, he turned to pray, and there was nobody there. He said, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Because Jesus Christ went into a furnace for you alone, you can get through these little furnaces *with* him.

He says, "I will always be there with you. I will always hold your hand in there, and all that will happen in the fires of your life, is your dross will be consumed and your gold refined." You think about it. You understand it, and you will sense the love of God flowing into your heart in a way like never before. "...we rejoice in our sufferings, because we **know**..."

Let's pray...