

Suffering, endurance, character, hope
Romans 5: 1-5
Jan. 4, 2009
Rev. Paul Nulton

Don Williams sings "I'm just an old lump of coal, but I'm gonna be a diamond someday."

Paul's trials:
Imprisoned
Faced death daily.
We are often beaten but have no home.
Paul had trouble.

The Greek word Paul uses for trouble means pressure.
We have trouble:
Pressure of how to get the basics with little money.
Tight finances
Sorrow
Persecution
Unpopular lonely

Suffering in itself does not necessarily strengthen character; it may simply break a person's spirit. The results depend entirely on the way in which it is accepted.
But suffering is necessary for endurance

The word for endurance means the spirit which can overcome the world. The spirit which is not just sitting around waiting for things to get better but actively overcomes and conquers the trouble of life. It is taking life by the throat. Sorrow colors life. You can choose the color.

An author named Henley was lying in a hospital with one leg amputated, waiting for the other to be removed. He wrote a poem:

'Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.'

We know God. The one who overcame death. So we too can grab hold of the Holy Spirit and meet trouble head on and undo it's pain. It's fortitude. It's endurance.

And endurance is necessary to produce character. Iron must be burned to become steel.

Metal that has passed through the fire has the imperfections burned out.
When a person loses their job, the first thing that gets burned out of the family budget are the things not needed to live. The gambling, the fun food, the toys, the trips are the first to go. Charles Wesley quotes Malachi in a hymn. "Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine"

Endurance produces character.

A deaf man still composes music. A blind woman still gets through her college courses and when her sight returns, goes on to become a medical doctor. It happened to one in this church.

Character

A person with a strong character is a person who is responsible for himself or herself. A character in Shakespeare's Hamlet says "to thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man."

Character is one who knows when to stand up against the pressures to do things the wrong way. A person who can't stand for something is a person who will fall for anything.

Character

A person who has enough self confidence to give up security for the sake of freedom.

And character produces hope.

One man said "I do not like crises, but I do like the opportunities they provide."

A person meets trouble and falls apart, or a person meets trouble and ends up with hope. What's the difference? The Holy Spirit is in one. And that one endures, gains character and looks forward to the good. This is not hope that the lottery, or a pill, or a relative will bail them out of their trouble. It is confidence in the love of God. It is the expectation that there will be love. All that practicing finding God in every situation will produce joy again.

I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord. Plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you." Jeremiah 29: 11-12

Suffering

Endurance

Character

Hope

And so we come to a time to tell Jesus Christ again that we will be his in 2009.

And we come to the communion table when Jesus Christ tells us we are his in 2009.

We have faced trouble, we have endured, it has built character, and now the hope we have does not disappoint. We know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.