

Patient in Tribulation

Romans 12:12b

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

You waken up in the morning and if you're getting married or on vacation, then zip-pi-dee-do-daa, it's a wonderful day! But most mornings you're not getting married and you're not going on vacation and just a few mornings (very few because of the healthy minded optimists that we all are!) you waken up and the miseries of the world swamp your mind and you think, "That office again", or you think, "I'll never get married at this rate", or you think "That miserable old dress, I've worn it a thousand times" or "That car, it's falling apart" or "Those bills, I'll never get them paid." And of course the healthy minded optimists or the worldly wise men that we have in our society, say, "It's not as bad as it looks. There's a silver lining to every dark cloud. Think of the people who have no car, think of the people who have no clothes, think of the people who have no job." We say, "Yeah, yeah that's right", so we lever ourselves out of bed, drop ourselves into the old car and go to the office with that kind of stoical determination, that "Let's go and get them again" attitude and that's human hope, isn't it?

That's the best that human hope can do. It's a kind of down at the mouth, "let's do our best", "may as well have a go at it" kind of attitude. That's not the kind of hope that brings you to your feet with joy and delight, and that enables you to have another shot at it because human hope can't bring anything to a situation. Isn't that its difficulty?

Human hope looks at things as they appear outwardly and tries to interpret them in the best possible light but it doesn't bring anything into the situation. Instead it tries to strain out of the situation whatever hope there may be in it. Of course the problem with that is there actually is no hope in those situations. There is no hope and there's a good reason loved ones, why there is no hope. It's not only the existentialist who will say that, God's word says it if you look at it in Romans 8:20.

"For the creation was subjected to futility not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope." Isn't that a strange verse? "for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope."

In other words, there is no hope in that situation because it's the Creator that has subjected this whole world and this whole life we have to futility. He subjected it to futility and to that kind of frustration that we feel, but he subjected it to futility in hope. You may ask "What kind of hope is that?" It's the hope that you and I would see how inadequately this world and the things in it meet our deepest longings.

You're right if you say, "You mean God has built into the creation, futility?" Well, not originally. Originally the world worked perfectly. But after we rebelled against him at the beginning of creation, yes, he allowed futility to come into the world so that you and I would, day-by-day, see that the world and the things in it could not fulfill the deepest longings that we have. In that way we would be forced to see that there is no hope in this world and that the only hope is divine hope.

In other words, there is no hope in Abraham, looking at his old 100-year-old wrinkled hands and

looking at his wife's 80-year-old face and saying "We have no baby, but I suppose we've got each other." There's no hope in that. But divine hope is Abraham looking at his body at 100 years of age and looking at Sarah at 80 years old, well past the time of bearing a child, and then looking up to his God and seeing that his God has promised that he will have a child and being fully convinced that his God is able to transform this situation by fulfilling his promise.

Divine hope is being absolutely confident that God will do what he has promised you and me. It's wakening up in the morning, it's seeing that that old dress is still there, that the old car is falling apart, that the office seems like the last place you want to be and that the home is getting you down, then looking up to your God and seeing him looking down at you saying, "There's no trial come upon you beyond what you're able to bear and with this trial, I am giving you the strength and a way of deliverance from it. (I Corinthians 10:13) I will supply every need that you have from my riches in glory in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:19)

So divine hope is getting up in the morning and seeing all those things as clearly as they were yesterday and then looking up to God and, laughing, saying, "Lord, I am looking forward to seeing how you're going to get us out of this one!" That's it. It's going through life with that certainty that he is going to get me through it. He is going to deliver me from it and I am looking forward to seeing how he is going to do it.

Two points: one, laugh immediately, that's right. That's what that verse says: "Rejoice in your hope." (Romans 12:12) Don't analyze your hope, don't question your hope, don't look at the situation and say, "Oh I don't see how God is going to, I don't." Don't do that, don't do it.

That's why God's word is so straight. When he says, "Rejoice in your hope" set your heart on the fact that God has promised, that there is no trial come upon you beyond what you're able to bear and that he is going to make a deliverance, a way for you in it. He is going to supply all your needs and rejoice in that; stop thinking right there and just rejoice in that -- laugh immediately. Don't go on thinking. Don't be drawn on by Satan into one more little worry, don't. That's where we destroy ourselves. Don't go on for one more second. The moment God's Spirit brings his promises to you, rejoice in him. Rejoice immediately.

The second point is, laugh the whole way down, okay? Laugh the whole way down. I'll show you that touching part of the Bible. We've laughed about it together before. It's Genesis 18:10 and it's the reason why you need to laugh the whole way down.

"The Lord said, I will surely return to you in the spring, and Sarah your wife, shall have a son. And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, 'After I have grown old and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?' The Lord said to Abraham, Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, in the spring, and Sarah shall have a son. But Sarah denied, saying, 'I did not laugh'; for she was afraid. He said, No, but you did laugh." It's so dear of God to say that.

That's why we laugh the whole way down; because God can see how deep your laugh goes, you see. He can see how real your confidence in his faithfulness is and he wants to see you laugh the whole way down. Not just the kind of superficial, auto-suggestion, power of positive thinking laugh, but he is looking at you and loved ones, our dear Father can see the innermost part of your heart. He can

look back and see all the times that he has delivered you in the past and all the times that he has given you strength that you haven't even known you had. He can see his own arms round about you and he has counted all the protons and the neutrons and he knows what will happen to you next year. He knows that he has you in his arms and he wants to hear his child laughing in confidence because he knows that's reality.

If you say to me, "Why is it important that he sees us like that -- the whole way down?" Oh, he wants people like himself to live with forever, that's it. He wants people who will love as he has loved, love so much that he has given himself away. He wants us to love him like that. He wants to be with people who are as real as he is and that's the whole aim of all the experiences we're going through, loved ones.

God is about the business of making you and me as real as he is, as real as he is in his attitude to us. So he wants us to be in our faith and confidence in him; that's why he allows these things to come. There's a passage that we've read before that says that very clearly. It's in Romans 5:3.

"More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us." That's why. That's what follows, loved ones, as we come into these things.

You may say, "Well, isn't there some easier way to make us real inside?" There isn't loved ones, there isn't. God actually uses the evil that is in this world to bring you and me into a place where we give up all human hope and where we begin to have hope in him born in our hearts.

In other words, the same thing is happening as is happening to Job if you look at Job 1. Many of us think of it as unusual because we can hardly believe that God would use Satan in some way to bring about his own purposes but he does. He uses even evil to do it. He doesn't send it, as he didn't create Satan, but he uses it.

Job 1:8, "And the Lord said to Satan, 'Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?' Then Satan answered the Lord, 'Does Job fear God for not? Hast Thou not put a hedge about him and his house and all that he has on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But put forth thy hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse thee to thy face.' And the Lord said to Satan, 'Behold, all that he has is in your power; only upon himself, do not put forth your hand.' So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord." That's what God is doing.

He doesn't touch our lives. He doesn't allow Satan to touch our lives. You and I will never lose our life in that way; we'll never die eternally. But God does allow Satan to touch all the things that you and I use as crutches in this world. All the things that we use as props for our own self-deification, God allows those to be touched. That's the only way, loved ones, he can bring us into the place where we hope in the one in whom hope is justifiable. It's the only way he can do it. He has to wring from us all our other hopes and you know, you and I are very resourceful people, we are. You think we were finished and we pop up and produce yet another way out!

We are very resourceful people and God's business is to bring us to the end of our own hopes to the place where there is real hopelessness so that we'll begin to see that all the hopes that we think

we see around us are temporary and superficial and aren't answering the real need of our hearts anyway. That's God's plan and hope like that can only be born, strangely enough, in the midst of hopelessness.

You and I like to think, "Oh no, it doesn't have to be as hopeless as this." Yes it does. That kind of hope will only come when we are absolutely hopeless in regard to the human situation. When is the time that you were most confident that God was there? Sitting beside the casket, when there's no hope? Cancer — at that moment? Financial disaster -- that moment? Absolute depression and hopelessness after your career has crashed, that moment? Absolute depression in a situation of unrequited love, that moment? We are all in different stages of faith and all of us will agree about that.

The best of times has been the worst of times and the worst of times has been the best of times. Every time we have all our human hopes taken out from under us, somehow absolute confidence that God will supply every need we have and that he is there and he is real and he exists, springs up in our hearts.

Loved ones, that's where Christian hope is so different from the human hope of humanitarians or the human hope of Buddhists or the human hope of Hindus. They all, in order to have hope, have to turn their eyes away from the realism of the situation and try to create human hope inside them.

But those of us who believe that we were in Jesus as he remained on the Cross so that his absolute confidence in his Father would overcome your forsakenness and my forsakenness as he cried out "Why hast Thou forsaken me", know that hope in God is borne in the midst of hopeless human situations.

In other words, the wonder of faith in Jesus is a sheer reality. It's the ability to look straight in the eyes of a miserable, depressing morning with the dark clouds around you, with all the horrible facts of your professional situation staring you straight in the face and yet to look steadfastly to God and say, "Lord, I thank you that I can be confident, that you have met every need of mine from your riches and glory in Christ Jesus and you're not going to stop doing that this day. You know this old dress of mine, you know this old car of mine, you know the situation in my office, you know the situation in my marriage and Lord, you are going to give me the strength to get through this trial and to come out at the other end." That's the wonder of hope in Jesus, loved ones. It's sheer reality and that explains the second clause or phrase in this verse that we're studying.

Romans 12:12, "Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation." So rejoice that God is meeting your need in the midst of this situation and will bring you through it, but be patient in the tribulation. Do you know what the word for patience is there? The special term that's used in the New Testament is called "hupomeno" and it's the same word that is used in Romans 5 that is translated "endurance." It's called "hupomeno" and it comes from two Greek words "hupo" meaning under and "meno" which comes into our English word "remain" and it means to remain under a tribulation, not in the sense of being borne down or being crushed by it, but remaining in the situation as Jesus remained on the Cross even though he could have saved himself by calling a thousand angels to his side.

So God says to us, "Have no fear. I know exactly where you are. Look at me -- I have overcome this situation already. I have destroyed it in Jesus and transformed it and I'll give you the benefits of that at the right moment but stay in the situation. Stay in that tribulation, that trial, that

burden, that trouble as long as it's my will for you to stay there, stay in it. Be patient in it. Stay right where you are." And you say, "Why?" Oh, because of what it says in Romans 5:3. "More than that we rejoice in our sufferings", that's our troubles, our trials, our tribulations, the things that all of us face financially and domestically and professionally and emotionally and psychologically, "We rejoice in our sufferings." Why? "Knowing that suffering produces endurance", and that is the word "hupomeno" actually, "Knowing that suffering produces patience and patience (endurance, "hupomeno") produces character."

Do you know the Greek word for character is "dokime" and it's the same word that is used when you have a coin and you hit it to see if it's true and real and current? It's a word that means proof. Patience produces proof. That is, patience produces the reality of a man or a woman who will believe God even if he slays him, and that's what God is after.

God is after, "Are you real, are you real, are you real, are you real, because anybody unreal in this heaven will turn it into hell. Are you real?" He keeps tapping us to see if we are real. So patience produces proof and proof produces hope, because when you're at the place where you say, "Lord God, you alone I trust. You alone I depend on and I know you have to destroy your whole character that you built up over thousands of years in negotiating with men and women in order to disappoint me. I trust you Lord. I trust you even if you slay me." Then at that moment loved ones, an absolute confidence rises in your heart that God will come through and that's why he says, "Be patient in tribulation."

I don't know about those of you who are still in your 20's but I think that those who are in their 30's, certainly those that are in their 40's, 50's and 60's know that there are certain things that you can fix now. Thank God. Jesus has overcome the world and he expects us as children to be up and doing and fixing as many things as we can. He expects us not to sit around and put up with the thing if we can put it right. But those of us who are in those age brackets where you've seen a little water go under the bridge, know that the real problems are grinders. They are grinders. They will not be fixed now. The real problems are those that will not be fixed immediately. It's the marriage that has never been right, it's never been right. It's always been unsatisfactory. At times you wonder should you ever have married, except you know that God doesn't let anything happen that he can't work according to the counsel of his will, but it won't be fixed. It's the son or daughter that won't convert. She won't convert. She despises your God. He hates your God. He does not believe in him, he has no time for it.

Today, in this economy, it's money situations that will not yield and will not respond. The interesting thing is, most of the real problems in the world are like that, and God says, "Stay in it, I didn't let this come to you because I was looking away for a moment. I didn't miss seeing this come into your life, I saw it. I didn't send it to you. It wouldn't have been my best for you but it's here and you're to stay in it and look at me and rejoice every day in absolute confidence that I am, first of all, working a reality in your character that can be worked in no other way. And secondly, that I am nibbling bit-by-bit at that dear one, at that situation, and I am moving it. And though the wheels of God grind slowly, they grind exceedingly fine and I will do a thorough job. So stay in the situation."

Loved ones, that's what it means. Not "stay in it, I am going to grin and bear it stoically." I stay in it because God has me here for his training, for his time, for his victory. And through it all I look up at him and say, "Lord God, thank you. I am confident that you're solving this situation and I am confident that you will manifest that in your time." That's it, loved ones.

If you say, "How long do you stay in it?" Until you go through the gates and everybody else says, "See that -- he didn't heal his cancer", and you can't hear them because of the shouts of joy as your Father opens his arms and you say, "Healed, more than healed. This is better than down there." That's it; you stay the whole way.

In other words, you outstay evil because God in fact has solved everything and he will manifest what he pleases here on this earth, or if not on this earth then he will manifest it in the next heaven, but our place is to rejoice in hope and to be patient in tribulation.

Let us pray.

Dear Father, You know how this kind of truth goes against the grain with us. Lord you know how we want instant relief. Father, we want an instant cure or an instant answer or we want to get out of the situation and get on with something else. Lord God we see that that way we'll remain adolescents. We see that that way we'll remain without character. That way we'll remain like children and we do see, our Father, that it's rejoicing in the midst of a situation that enables your Spirit to work into our hearts an unbreakable, invincible faith and confidence in you that even the gates of hell cannot prevail against.

So Father, we would thank you for these situations that we are in. We realize Lord that you're working and that you work slowly but surely and that you have already overcome the world in Jesus and therefore the manifestation of this could be in a moment if you chose. But you are working something in our hearts and in others' hearts and lives that requires time.

Father we thank you and we commit ourselves to remaining in this situation and thanking you for it and meanwhile our Father, we're going to exercise our spirits and our faith and allow them to grow stronger under the weight until they lift the weight up itself. Father we thank you for that and we thank you for your goodness and faithfulness and for your sure words, "There is no trial come upon you above what you're able to bear and with the trial, I will provide a way of deliverance." Thank you Father.

The grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now and evermore. Amen.