

This Sunday I preached from Romans 5:1-11. In this text Paul speaks of the fruit of justification as being the establishment of a new relationship with God in which we have peace. No longer are we God's enemies but friends and as such can be confident in experiencing the blessing of a restored relationship with God in which we experience his blessing. And this blessing is nothing less than what Paul calls the hope of God's glory in which we boast, in which we have confidence and joy. It is this hope of God's glory that functions as the main theme of verses 1-11. Since we have been set in right relationship with God we can know with certainty that we are going to see the manifestation of his glory in our lives and through us in the world. And the manifestation of God's glory is his own character as the God of compassion, mercy, forgiveness, patience and justice. He is the God who is faithful, who upholds the cause of the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry, who sets the prisoners free, who gives sight to the blind, who loves the righteous and who looks after the orphan and the widow. And this glory of God is being worked in us who have been established as righteous by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now the means God uses to shape that glory in us, to develop and mature it is our trials/afflictions. Paul says we rejoice in our sufferings because we know God will use them to work perseverance, character and hope in us. He uses the trials to mature our faith as we place our trust in his character and promises in the midst of it all. And out of this comes a greater hope in seeing the display of God's glory in us and in the world. And that hope will not be put to shame. It will be fulfilled. God guarantees that we will see this display of his glory by pouring his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom he gave us and ultimately through the giving of his Son to reconcile us even while we were still sinners. This is our confidence, that the one who did not spare his own Son but freely gave him up for us will with him freely give us all things cf. Romans 8:32.

As you gather for house church this week here are some questions to consider together:

1. I used Exodus 33:12-19 and 34:5-7 in defining what the glory of God is. I also added Psalm 146:5ff. There are many other passages that could be used. What do you think of how God himself defines his own glory? Is this how you are used to thinking of the glory of God? Is this how you think about God's own glory being lived out in your own life? In what ways does this encourage you and in what ways does it challenge you?
2. How do you honestly view suffering and how do Paul's words here give perspective as you face trials of all kinds?
3. Obviously there are trials that we may never fully understand how God used them to shape our faith. But are there trials that you can look back on and see how God used them to work a deeper faith and hope in your life?
4. Can you think of examples in scripture where people suffered? How did they handle their suffering? How did God demonstrate faithfulness to his people in the midst of that suffering?
5. How do the gift of the Spirit and the work of Christ in giving his own life give us assurance in seeing the manifestation of God's glory in our lives and through us into the world?