TITLE: Character

TEXT: 1Peter 2:11-12; John 3:25-30; Ro. 5:1-5;

Phil. 4:10-13; 2 Co. 11& 23-30 & 12:7-10; 1 Thess. 5:16-18

INTRODUCTION: This morning I want to talk about character.

 First, just what is it? What are we talking about when we talk about character?

Merriam Webster defines character as:
**One of the attributes or features that make up and distinguish an individual; REPUTATION; moral excellence and firmness “a man of sound character”;**

Greek word is : **dok-ee-may'**

**approved, tried character**

**3) a proof, a specimen of tried worth**

**by implication *trustiness:* *approved, tried***

 The Word of God is full of men and women of exemplary character! And a few of un-exemplary character as well.

 Character is not something that we are born with, but something that we develop as we go along in life.

 Character is largely developed by the day to day choices that we make in this life.

 Do you realize that as Christians God has called us to be people of exemplary character?

**1 Peter 2:11-12(NKJV)**  **11Beloved, I beg *you* as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul,** **12having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by *your* good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.**

I love how Peter addresses us here!

**Beloved!**

 The KJV says “**dearly beloved”**

The Greek word used here for beloved is:

 agapētos

1. **beloved, esteemed, dear, favorite, worthy of love**

**11Beloved, I beg *you* as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul,  12having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by *your* good works which they observe (**byyour character), **glorify God in the day of visitation.**

 As Christians your and my character is a direct reflection upon our God!

J.R. Miller once wrote:

 *“The only thing that walks back from the tomb with the mourners and refuses to be buried is the character of a man. What a man is survives him. It can never be buried.”*

Wow! What a statement! What a dynamic truth!

*“The only thing that walks back from the tomb (the grave) with the mourners and refuses to be buried is the character of a man. What a man is survives him.*

 *It can never be buried.”*

John MacArthur said this regarding this statement:

 *While that statement is true, there is something more important than what people think of us after we die: It’s the impact we have on others for the sake of Jesus Christ while we live.*

 *As you go through life---earning an honest wage, keeping your word, returning good for evil, regarding others more important than yourself---continually give Jesus the credit. Let His glory shine so bright that when your days on earth are done, your loved ones will say, “What a great God this disciple served.”*

What a wonderful way to be remembered after we leave this life!

 To have people say: “What a great God this disciple served.”

 Let’s look at a man of exemplary character in Scripture this morning that had this prospective of personal character and that is John the Baptist…

**John 3:25-30(NKJV)**  **25Then there arose a dispute between *some* of John’s disciples and the Jews about purification.**  **26And they came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified—behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!”**  **27John answered and said, “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven.**  **28You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but, ‘I have been sent before Him.’**  **29He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled.**  **30He must increase, but I *must* decrease.**

 John the Baptist had been a pretty popular religious celebrity among the people!

 He could have been resentful of this new guy on the scene that the people were swarming to.

 The ones that came to John telling him about Jesus, the one who had been with John on the other side of the Jordan, the one John himself had earlier baptized, who now had many coming to Him instead of John, would probably themselves have resented the intrusion on their popularity.

 But notice John’s response?

 **He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled.  He must increase, but I *must* decrease.**

 Does it sound like there was any resentment in John over the increasing popularity of Jesus, the popularity, that John, weeks earlier, had himself enjoyed? NO!

 The exemplary character John displayed in his life was to bring glory to God, not to himself.

 When told of the increasing popularity and influence of Jesus John’s reply was:

 **He must increase but I must decrease!**

What an exemplary character John possessed!

Scripture has much to say to us as Christians about good character and how we are to attain it.

**Romans 5:1-5(NIV)**  **1Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,** **2through 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.**

**3Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;** **4perseverance, character; and character, hope.**  **5And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.**

 As Christians each of us has a great hope! We have the hope of Heaven and spending an eternity with our Lord in a place where there is no more sickness, sorrow, suffering, pain or death!

 This is a hope that we should always rejoice in! Rejoice in even when we are going through the hard times of this life.

The Apostle Paul says:

 **And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.
3Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;  4perseverance, character; and character, hope.
5And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.**

 How can we even rejoice in our sufferings while we are here on this earth?

 Because of what those sufferings accomplish in us as we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus!

**…..but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;  perseverance, character; and character, hope.**

You see it is the development of good character that gives us the hope of the glory of God fulfilled in our life!

 Personal suffering gives us the opportunity to develop character more than when we just sail along in life trouble free.

 We can smile and rejoice when things are going well for us, but that may not be the result of a good character but merely being content.

 However, if we can rejoice, even when going through hard times, than that displays a good character.

 Paul really understood how good character and contentment was meant to work together in the life of a Christian.

 **Philippians 4:10-13(NIV)**  **10I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it.
11I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.
12I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.**  **13I can do everything through him who gives me strength.**

 I don’t know of anyone here this morning that was born with the proverbial “silver spoon in their mouth”, never having lacked for anything.

 I imagine each of us here this morning know of some of the extremes that Paul talks about here.

 To know what it is like to be in need, and know what it is like to have plenty, to have experienced being well fed and experienced being hungry, of both living in plenty and living in want.

 Just listen to Paul’s personal testimony in 2nd Corinthians in chapters 11 and 12:

**2 Corinthians 11:23-30 (NIV)**  **….I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again.**  **24Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.
25Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea,
26I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers.
27I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.
28Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.
29Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?
30If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.**

Then Paul goes on in:

**2 Corinthians 12:7-10(NIV)**  **7To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.**  **8Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.**

**9But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”**

 **Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.
10That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**

 Paul, born Saul of Tarsus, was more than likely someone who was born with a silver spoon in his mouth

 Paul came from a prominent family and was himself an up and coming leader among the Pharisee’s.

 If Paul lived in our day, in his early years, he probably would have been a good candidate to win on Donald Trumps OLD TV show “The Apprentice.”

 In his zeal to be a good Pharisee and thinking he was doing Gods bidding he went around persecuting the early Church and was even standing there consenting to the death of the first Church martyr, Stephen.

 But after his encounter with the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus we find that Paul really did become a man of exemplary character.

 How do you suppose Paul’s exemplary character was primarily developed? In his early years when he probably had no needs or wants in his life and just sailed along smoothly, or after he came to Christ and found the road he walked terribly bumpy at times?

 I believe his personal testimony reveals that answer…

**….I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again.
24Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.
25Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea,**

**26I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers.
27I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.
28Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.**

Yet Paul is able to say:

**I delight in these things! I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**

Here Paul reveals how exemplary character is developed—the only way it is attained!

**For when I am weak, then I am strong.**

**For His power is revealed the most in our weakness!**

What Paul was saying was that It is only when I have come to my wits end, when I have done all within me that there is to do and still come up short, when I have exhausted all of my power and my strength to fix the situation, and the situation is still not fixed, it is only as I am truly emptied of self that I can totally and completely just give it to God!

 And when I do I find that His strength is always sufficient for me! When I come to the end of my strength and enter my weakness is when God can really take over and that is when I become the strongest!

That is how Paul can go on to say in:

**1 Thessalonians 5:16-18(NIV)**  **16Be joyful always;** **17pray continually;**  **18give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.**

**Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.**

This is not saying that when we go through a hard time in our life we have to give thanks to God for the hard time, but we should always give thanks to God in our hard times because of what He can do within us through that hard time.

**Example:**

 Several years ago I severely broke up my left arm. A double compound fracture that required around 12 surgeries over a 5 year period and some of those surgeries came with very painful recoveries.

 A few years ago I severely broke my right arm and shoulder and it has required 13 surgeries in the past few years going from a partial shoulder replacement to a full replacement to a reverse replacement and now back to a regular replacement that has now come apart.

 I am not thankful for either injury! However, I was very thankful to God in those injuries!

 God was able to do more in me thought those difficult times than if those difficult times had not happened.

 In those times, with each upcoming surgery, I always had come to the end of my strength and had to simply rely upon His.

 And I have always found His strength to be sufficient!

 And not just enough but more than enough!

 I have personally experienced, on many occasions in my life, that: **13I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.**

 And with each time we come to the end of our strength and rely on God and His strength, putting our trust in Him, our Character is strengthened and we find, more and more, that we can in fact Give thanks to God in all circumstances, for this is His will for us in Christ Jesus, His will for us as a Christian!

 And with each act of that trust in and reliance upon God, our Christian character is strengthened and we become a little more like Jesus---the perfect model of exemplary character.

 Why is character so important?

Because *“The only thing that walks back from the tomb (the grave) with the mourners and refuses to be buried is the character of a man.*

 Good or bad, our character is what will live on in this world after we leave it.

 Our character will be the most valuable inheritance that we will leave behind in this life.

How would you describe your character this morning?

 Is our character becoming more and more reflective of Jesus as we strive daily to become more and more like Him?

For that is our calling as a Christian……To reflect His character within our world leading the lost and hurting of our world to Him.

**1 Thessalonians 5:16-18(NIV)
16Be joyful always;  17pray continually;
18give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.**