

“There’s More to Come!”
Romans 8:18-25
7-26-20

Since we began our “Anchor” sermon series based on Romans, Chapter 8, we have heard some really encouraging words from Paul.

- “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”
- That the Spirit of God dwells in us and directs our lives as Christians.
- That we are co-heirs with Christ.
- And as co-heirs, we are children of God and call call out to him as our Father.
- And yes, as co-heirs, we would even experience suffering in this life, because that is indeed what Christ went through.

Now that last part might not sound that encouraging left on it’s own. But Paul doesn’t just leave us there. Right after he says that as fellow heirs with Christ, we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him—the last verse of our reading last week—he begins our reading today with an encouragement whopper. **“For I consider that the sufferings of the present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”**

Now I think we hear these words are we’re kind of like. We know, we know. There is a day coming when everything’s going to be OK. But we have to slow down here and really meditate on these words. Because this is an absolutely ridiculous statement from Paul. If I told you that “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to the glory that is to come,” you might be like “sounds good.” Even if you knew that I got stung by a sting ray a couple of weeks ago and am still on two antibiotics trying to fight the infection. That’s on top of the neck pain, the shoulder pain, the finger pain, the lack of sleep, daughters in COVID hotspots, a son getting ready to join them, and two more at home going to school in the new classroom we had to make upstairs, you would probably still think “well you might have had some setbacks, glad you consider this stuff not worth comparing to what is to come. But still you’re life is pretty good.” And you would be right! My life, despite all my ailments, and worries, and inconveniences is pretty good.

But we're talking about Paul saying this. Paul—the one who was nearly beaten to death a bunch of times. The one who was shipwrecked, snake-bitten, stoned, starved, and run out of town over and over again. The one who spent a large percentage of his life in prison—all on account of Christ. This man knew suffering—not low grade suffering kind of stuff like I mentioned in my life, but legit, high-level suffering. He's saying that all of that—all of that physical and emotional pain he went through for so much of his life—all of it, he says, is not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

And this is classic Paul. Because what he's doing here is magnifying that glory. It's as if he's saying "Listen my friends, what's coming because of Christ is so amazing, it's so awesome, that even with all of this suffering put together, it's nothing compared to the amazing awesomeness that is to come. And this is what we need to remember. Because this is the encouragement. On the days when it's really hard— and you know what I'm talking about. On those days we need to remember to look towards what's coming. Because there's more to come. And it's way better.

And none of this is to diminish the suffering that we all go through. Because it's real. No matter who you are, we all suffer in various ways. I mean, we all might hear stories of tremendous suffering or even know folks who have endured some intense hardships and pain and wonder how those folks made it through. I mean I read just the other day a tragic and sad account of 13 sisters of the faith—**Catholic nuns living in a convent in Michigan, who all died from COVID 19. The first one died on Good Friday and the latest at the end of June. They suffered.** And so did the 52 remaining ladies in the convent, who described the agony and grief of not being able to share in their sister's dying days. That's a real and extreme case. But things hurt, we all know that. When they're extreme, like this tragedy, and when they're what we might consider less extreme—they hurt. And so what Paul is doing here is saying that he knows a thing or two about suffering. He suffered hard. And because he did, we're able to take our sincere, genuine, authentic, painful suffering and know that if Paul can say that his suffering is not worth being compared with the glory that is to come, then we can say that too. Again, it's not to diminish your suffering or mine. But it's a way to see those things in our lives and say, "look if Paul is able to take his suffering and look to the glory to come, we can do the same.

And Paul's just getting started with the encouragement. Because he continues with "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God." Paul wants his readers to understand that when the end comes there will be this revelation of not just Jesus coming back in the flesh but all of God's people being raised to live with him. And that all of creation is awaiting this day when everything will finally be made right. Sometimes I think we forget about this—that creation too is groaning. That it's waiting to be set free from the bondage of corruption and obtain the very same glory of the children of God. We tend to think that all of this good news about redemption is about us. But because of sin, creation is on the road to destruction. It's all broken. This thing that God said was so good, it too is groaning. It too is crying out waiting for the day that it will be restored. And it will be everything—not just the one's with faith in Jesus. God takes his creation, not just us, very personally, and he's going to redeem and restore it all.

I love the way Paul says it. "For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now." Now I've never had a baby. I've seen my wife have 5. But I know enough as a father to see that the pain associated with it produces such joy when that child is born. Yes there's suffering in the process, but that suffering pales in comparison to we get at the end.

The same, in a way, is what this life Christian life is all about. All things are being made new—things we can't comprehend—and things we haven't gotten yet. Yes, we still struggle with the flesh. We suffer. But there's something coming. As Paul writes in verse 23. Even as we struggle, suffer, groan inwardly—we wait eagerly for the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved.

And the older we get, I think the more this becomes very real for us. I know I eagerly await the redemption of my body the older I get. The nagging little pains that turn into chronic problems. The neck pain, the shoulder pain, the finger pain, the sing ray pain. As we age, most of us are not getting better are we? And lately, with all my little problems, I've been honestly looking at this whole redemption of the body as a really good thing. Because no matter what takes us from this mortal life, whether it's COVID, a car wreck, heart-attack, stroke, cancer—whatever it is, there is a 100% chance that all of us will die.

That's why Paul encourages as he does. Death won't be the end. Just as Christ was raised, we will be raised. There will be redemption of our bodies. That means bodies that work perfectly just the way they were created to work. Not spirits floating around in some made up la la version of heaven. Not an escape from the material world. But real people living in a real redeemed world with a real Christ as our King. For in this hope we are saved, Paul writes.

I know it's hard because we might not have evidence of what what is coming. I know it's hard because our own struggles with sin and suffering tend overshadow it all. But again, Paul gives us the encouragement. "Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes in what he sees? But if we have hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."

Hope is confident trust in what is not seen. And it's grounded in Christ's resurrection. Faith, hope, and love Pauls says. So with wait patiently with faith in the promises of Christ. We wait with hope. Because when all of this mess is made right—when it's all redeemed and cruising into eternity just the way it was supposed to work from the beginning, we won't need faith, because we will be living it. We won't need hope because we will see it. All we will need is the greatest of these, which is love. And that love of our Lord Jesus Christ has no end.

Until that day, we live our Christian lives knowing that there's more to come. Amen.