

What to Know When You are Suffering

Read Romans 8:17-25

- **Vs. 17** - “*Heirs of God*” - In such places as **Ezekiel 37**, God promised his heirs resurrection by His Spirit. In **Isaiah 65 & 66** God promises his heirs a new creation.
- The church is now declared as the heirs of God, and therefore Paul is assuring us that we will receive all that God has promised.
- First half of Romans 8, Paul declared that the Holy Spirit has given us this new life. In the second half of Romans 8, Paul reminds us of all that comes with the Holy Spirit. Paul is assuring us of our inheritance -- and that it will be attained through suffering.
- Just as Jesus achieved his glory as the Son of God through suffering, we who are also the sons of God in Christ will achieve our future glories through present sufferings.

In summary, Paul is saying: Our present sufferings are **not by accident** and they are **worth it**.

- In other words, whatever suffering may be necessary in your life as a Christian, it's worth it in view of what you will gain by trusting in Christ.
- Paul is wanting to assure you of your HOPE in Christ.
- Of course, last week I began looking at this passage - but I focused on the “suffering” part = painful realism = suffering due to pain, persecution, sanctification, illness, corruption, sin, natural disasters, etc.

So many Christians do not understand that God has decreed all of our suffering -- and it is for our good and His glory.

- In fact, God has decreed all suffering in the world.
 - Deist, Naturalist, and Humanist reject that truth. They explain everything in terms of merely natural laws, not divine decrees.
 - There is no comfort in that type of theology.
 - The Bible teaches the sovereignty of God... even in suffering. **v. 20**: "The creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope."
 - The miserable condition of the world today – its futility and corruption and groaning – are owing to the judicial decree of God in response to sin.
 - God has cursed this universe with suffering because of sin.
 - WHY? So that we can have hope!!
 - ➔ What does that mean? It means God decreed suffering so that we would know how horrific sin is. Man wants to eat of the knowledge of evil = then man needs to know how horrific evil is. So God decreed all suffering.
 - ➔ As man comes to know, feel and experience the horrific misery of sin, man finds his only hope in God.
- Therefore, the meaning of all the misery in the world is that sin is horrific. All natural evil is a statement about the horror of moral evil. All human evil is a statement about the evil of sin.

- The meaning of futility and the meaning of corruption and the meaning of our groaning is that sin – falling short of the glory of the holy God – is ghastly, hideous, repulsive beyond imagination.
- Unless you have some sense of the infinite holiness of God and the unspeakable outrage of sin against this God, you will inevitably see the futility and suffering of the universe as an overreaction. You will think God is immoral to allow suffering.
- But in fact the point of our miseries, our futility, our corruption, our groaning is to teach us the horror of sin..... And the preciousness of redemption and hope.

Notice that Paul puts our sufferings in a global context.

- First, he shows that the futility and corruption and groaning of the world is a judicial decree of God, not just a fluke or a law of nature. God subjected the creation to futility.
- Second, he shows that this subjection includes all history from the fall to the coming of Christ. There is no period of history that escaped or will escape from this decree of futility. But it is temporary. It had a beginning (verse 20), and it will have an end (verse 21 – "the creation will be set free from his slavery to corruption").

He reminds us of all of this so that we can have the right word-view concerning our suffering -- the right attitude -- a proper theology -- so that we can endure our sufferings with hope.

- Paul is reminding us that our suffering in this life are part of a global, divinely-ordained futility (v. 20) and decay (v. 21) and groaning (v. 23).
- In other words, the sufferings of this life are part of a universal, God-decreed collapse of creation into disorder because of sin.
- God subjected the world to futility – that's verse 20 – because of sin. And therefore all the misery of the world – and it is great – is a bloody declaration about the ghastly horror of sin.

In the end, the issue is not whether your pain is triggered by man or Satan or nature, but whether you trust the sovereign goodness of God over it all and through it all to bring you to everlasting glory.

- The comfort and encouragement of this text is not that God has nothing to do with hostile humans or hateful demons or harmful nature, but that in it all and through it all he has hope-filled designs for his children.
- This is what **verse 28** summarizes: **And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.**

Notice **SIX PROMISES OF HOPE** in this text to help you endure suffering and futility.

1. God promises that our... **Present Suffering is Followed by Future Glory**

- **Verse 18: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us."**
- "**Glory**" = "overwhelming, all-satisfying beauty and greatness."
- "**Be revealed to us**" = "we will see it."
 - Seeing beauty and greatness is one of the passionate desires and deep longings of the human heart – built into us by God.
 - We get pleasure from seeing beauty and greatness in movies and museums and world-class sporting events and art galleries and concerts and the Sequoias and the Grand Canyon and the

Sand Dunes of Superstition and the sunset on the Pacific Ocean and sunrises on the desert and meteor showers. Seeing beauty and greatness is a huge part of our joy in life.

- All of these earthly things are images, reflections, **pointers to a greater beauty and a greater greatness**. They all point to the glory of God. Seeing the Glory of God be the end of our quest for beauty and greatness.
- Our present sufferings do not have the last word!!!!!!
- This is why Jesus prayed for us the way he did in John 17:24, "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory." This was the greatest thing Jesus could pray for on our behalf. Seeing the glory of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was the best gift Jesus could pray that we would receive after we had suffered in this life.
- BUT we are capable of being able to handle God's glory, yet.... Which leads us to the second statement about our hope.

2. God promises that one day... **We Will Be Glorified.**

- **Verse 19: "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God."**
- So verse 18 says that something will be revealed to us, and verse 19 says that we ourselves will be revealed. What does this mean?
 - It means that right now the children of God do not look glorious. We look pretty much like everyone else and everything else. We get hungry and tired and sick. We age and we die. And on the way to the grave we make some progress in overcoming our selfishness and pride and greed,
 - but we never get beyond the need to be justified by faith alone because of Christ alone, and we will say with Paul till the day we die, "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?" (Romans 7:24).
 - So we don't not look all that great right now!
- And most relevant of all, consider **verse 21** here in our own text: "**that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.**" The freedom of the glory of the children of God!
 - So "*the revealing*" in verse 19 is "*the freedom of the glory of*" God's children.
 - verse 17 – says that we would be glorified with Christ = which means that our bodies and minds and hearts would be so completely renovated that nothing would stand in the way of savoring Christ for all he is worth.
 - Verse 18 says we will see the glory of God. Verse 19 says we will be able to handle it.
 - We will see the greatest glory in the universe, and we will savor that glory, because we will be changed by that glory so completely that **we are free** from anything that would hinder us.
- And **don't miss one other massive truth in verse 19**: all of creation is oriented for us.
 - God made the universe for us, not us for the universe.
 - We inherit the world, the world doesn't inherit us.
 - Creation is cursed with futility and suffering and decay so that we human, children of God, can understand the horribleness of sin.

- So that we will look unto God for salvation that we may worship him instead of ourselves.
- So all creation is waiting for the consummation of our redemption - so that we can properly worship and glorify God.

3. All Suffering has a Purpose - God Promises that His Ultimate Design in the Decree of Futility Is Hope for His Children

- **Verse 20: "For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope"**
- The effect this is supposed to have on us is to make us seriously and soberly hopeful.
 - Serious and sober because God has decreed the fall of the universe into futility and decay and groaning and weakness.
 - That is a very serious thought that makes us sober.
 - It makes us shut our mouths, stop our whining foolishness and stand in awe and respect of God.
 - It makes us tremble with a due respect for the infinitely holy God who rules over the universe with justice and hatred for sin.
- But the point of verse 20 is that this futility and judgment is not his ultimate design. The words "*in hope*" at the end of verse 20 show that **God's aim** in his judicial decree of futility and pain is hope.
 - So when you feel almost overwhelmed by your own pain and the pain of the world, remember: this was not God's final design.
 - If you will trust him and hold fast to him as your treasure, then it will all be turned for your good.
 - That's what the word "hope" means at the end of verse 20.

4. The World will Get Better - God Promises that All Creation, not Just the Children of God, Will Be Freed from the Present Misery of Futility and Corruption and Groaning

- **Verse 21: "that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God."**
- We've already seen from verse 19 that the children are going to be revealed with glory that suits them to enjoy the glory of God. But now we see the other part of the promise in verse 21: Creation too will be freed from its slavery to corruption and decay and futility.
 - In other words, the universe will be changed into a place perfectly suited for the perfected and glorious children of God.
 - No more destructive tornadoes or hurricanes or floods or droughts or plagues or diseases or harmful animals or insects or viruses.
 - The prophecy of **Isaiah 65:17** will come to pass that God will create a new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind.
 - And the prophecy of **Revelation 21:1-5** will come to pass as well, as John said: I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. . . . 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more,

neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. 5 And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."

- Remember I said that we must be changed in order to see God's glory? Well, Creation must be changed in order to be a suitable environment for freedom of the glory of the children of God.
 - In other words, our freedom and our glory will be so great that only a glorified world will be adequate to suit our almost infinite capacities for happiness and worship of God.

5. Our Pain Leads to Life - God Promises that the Miseries of the Universe Are not the Throes of Death but the Labor Pains of Childbirth

- This is a perspective issue. CHANGE YOUR THINKING. Change your worldview.
- **Verse 22: "For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now."**
 - This is another way of saying that God subjected the creation to futility in hope (v. 20). That is, in the hope for something much better than the pain coming out of all this.
- Picture yourself in a hospital and a woman is screaming in pain: would it matter if you were in a maternity ward instead of an Emergency Room. YES. Because some pain leads to life and some pain leads to death.
- And what verse 22 promises is that for the children of God, all pain leads to life. EVEN the pains of death! - LABOR PAINS are worth it - they bring forth life!

6. One Day We Shall Never Hurt Again - God Promises that Our Physical Bodies Will Be Redeemed from All Groaning

- **Verse 23: "And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."**
- Paul wrote to the Corinthians that at the last day the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:51-55)

To Believers: this is your hope, we cannot see it yet with our physical eyes, but we wait for it – with groaning and patience and unconquerable joy. If we believe God, we have hope.

To Unbelievers: "As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12). And if children, heirs of all these promises. Receive him. Trust him.