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*“Incomparable Glory”*

ROMANS 8:18-25

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## AT A GLANCE

Life can be really painful. Things don't go the way we expected they would. We get a diagnosis that leaves us stunned and shocked. Bills stack up. A friend betrays us. Life is hard. That's just the way it is. But the beautiful hope of redemption is that this is not *always* going to be the way it is!

In this passage in Romans Paul fills us with hope that one day our suffering will turn into glory. So, eyes up weary traveler, straighten your back, put one foot in front of the other; your redemption, and your redeemer draws near!

## INTRODUCTION

I'm a little self-conscious today about my nose. On Monday I had to have some Basel Cell carcinoma removed. Kids, I wish I took better care of my skin early in life. It's no fun to have skin cancer removed. When you shake my hand at the back today, try not to stare, ok? I'd appreciate that. But you know this is a great application of our text today.

My body wasn't supposed to react to the sun the way it does. The sun wasn't supposed to give me cancer. I wasn't supposed to have to have a piece of my flesh carved out. But I did. Why? Because we live in a fallen world and things don't work the way they're supposed to. It's a sad reality of the world we live in. But it's not always going to be like this. This is the glorious hope of redemption captured in our passage today!

## ROMANS 8:18-25

<sup>18</sup> For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

## SUFFERING AND THEN GLORY

In verses 16 & 17 the Spirit reminds us we are **children of God** and **fellow heirs with Christ**. But there's a provisional statement: **provided we suffer with Him in order that may also be glorified with Him**. Does our suffering cause us to become children of God? No, we are saved by grace through faith.

We are children of God, but our sonship follows the pattern of *the* Son of God, whose glory came after His suffering. *“Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” Luke 24:26*

Following Jesus is not a means of escape from suffering and hardship. Jesus didn't mince words with His disciples, *“In this world you will have tribulation.” John 16:33a* We're going to suffer, that's a fact of life in the fallen world. However, following Jesus does redeem our suffering! Paul says that our suffering in this life leads to glory as co-heirs with Christ.

Peter likewise says, *“But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.” 1 Peter 4:13*

Even Jesus taught this, *“Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven...” Luke 6:22-23*

Paul says in **verse 18 I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.** When he says, **I consider**, he's not expressing an opinion. The Apostle is making an authoritative judgment and has the scars to back it up. *“...for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.” Galatians 6:17* What marks of Jesus?

*“Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned...” 2 Corinthians 11:24-25* Paul knew what it was like to suffer for Christ. What was his assessment about it all? Just a few chapters earlier in the same letter he wrote, *“For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,” 2 Corinthians 4:17*

### THIS ISN'T WISHFUL THINKING

There is no wishful thinking in Pauline theology, no vision of utopia. There will be suffering. You are going to endure all kinds of hardships. But all you endure now is **not even worth comparing to the glory that is to be revealed to us.**

I love what Kent Hughes said here, *“We can compare a thimble of water with the sea, but we cannot compare our sufferings with the coming glory.”*

**Verse 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.** Paul means all **creation** other than mankind. He personifies creation as scripture often does. In Psalm 98:8, the rivers clap and the hills sing for joy. In Isaiah 55:12, the mountains and hills sing, and the trees clap with joy.

This **eager longing** of creation is sort of like stretching the neck in anticipation of glimpsing something spectacular; it's like creation is on its tiptoes trying to see this glorious thing!

Redemption is going to go beyond the realm of humanity. All of creation will be redeemed at the **revealing of the sons of God.** Why is this necessary? Because the earth and everything in it was cursed in Genesis 3.

### ALL OF CREATION IS SUFFERING

Creation itself is kept from performing as it was created to perform, from producing as it was created to produce. It was throttled, repressed, & frustrated as Paul says in **verse 20. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it.**

God said, *“cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;” Genesis 3:17-18*

The creation was not intended to produce thorns and thistles. This is God's punishment for Adam and Eve. It was their task to exercise dominion over the earth, to subdue it, to bring order out of chaos. But they rejected God and His rule, and the result was that the whole creation was subjected to futility.

## CREATION SET FREE

Paul continues, saying that the creation was subjected to futility, **in hope** <sup>21</sup> **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.**

Creation is currently in **bondage to corruption**, that is, to decay and death. It cannot produce or perform as it was created to. However, just as the curse of Adam and Eve was not forever, the cursed creation will soon be **set free from its bondage to corruption.**

If you think the world is beautiful today, imagine when it is set free from bondage to corruption, when it's not restrained by sin and curse; when the Lord makes a new heaven and a new earth. *"Then 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."* Revelation 21:1

I have been blessed by the Lord with the opportunity to behold and to glory in His creation in some of the most beautiful places. I'm sure you can think back to moments that left you amazed by the glory of creation.

That glory you beheld was of a creation in bondage to corruption. It's hard to fathom what will be the majesty of the unbound new earth. This will be our eternal dwelling place, the new heaven and new earth, where God will dwell among His people. Everything will work the way it's supposed to.

**Verse 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.** Parents understand what this means, the **pains of childbirth.** It's the excruciating pain a woman experiences in labor.

The **whole creation** is feeling these pains, **groaning together.** This implies something. What comes after the pains of childbirth? The bliss of a new baby! Think about the joy, the peace, the elation that comes the moment you hold the baby in your arms! Now tell me, moms, would you compare the pain of childbirth with the glory of the child? Would you say, "Nah, it wasn't worth it?" No way! It doesn't deny the pain, it simply puts it in its place.

The creation is going to be released from these pains at some point and it's going to be glorious! Just as a mother is released from the pain of childbirth, almost forgetting the pain the moment the baby is laid upon her chest. Some would even say the pain was part of the glory.

When you have a child, the moment the baby is placed on the mother's skin is a moment full of glory. It is pregnant, so to speak, with emotion – with the relief that it's over, with the gratitude for a healthy baby, with the satisfaction of completion.

## WE OURSELVES

All of creation is currently groaning together in the pains of childbirth. But Paul isn't writing to encourage creation. He's writing to encourage you! **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.**

Just as the creation is permitted to groan in the pain of childbirth, we, too, are permitted to groan. No one disparages a woman from groaning under the intense pressure of childbirth. Next week we'll

see that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. Child of God, you are permitted to **groan** because life is not supposed to be this way. We don't have to deny the pain...

Mothers and fathers are not supposed to lose their babies.

We're not supposed to battle cancer and we're not supposed to die young.

Our bodies aren't supposed to breakdown and our minds aren't supposed to lust.

Our children aren't supposed to rebel and our parents aren't supposed to neglect.

Businesses are not supposed to fail and marriages aren't supposed to be frustrating.

### HARDSHIP IS GOING TO PAY OFF

This is not the way life was supposed to be. It's ok to groan. It's ok to mourn. It's ok to cry out, "Wretched man that I am, who will rescue me from this body of death?" We don't have to deny the pain. But here's the deal, knowing ahead of time that you're going to have to walk through hardship but afterward it's all going to pay off makes the walk so much more bearable. This is where we must constantly remind ourselves our sufferings cannot compare to the glory that lies ahead!

This should fill us with a real hope, and it ought to give us the necessary stamina to persevere to the end. We don't have to deny the pain, but we ought to put pain in its place.

Plus, it is not as though the Lord has abandoned us to walk alone. Paul refers to us as **we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit.**

He uses an agricultural term here. We have the **firstfruits of the Spirit.** The Spirit is the indication of what is to come. He is the promise of a better future. He is a pledge that God will come through on the rest He has promised.

The Holy Spirit is more than just a promise. He is an ever-present help. We will see next week that He "helps us in our weakness." (v. 26)

But now **we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.** We wait eagerly, we crane our necks, we strain forward, we stand on tiptoes to get a glimpse of our relief over the horizon. We long for our redemption, for the glory that is to come. The glory that will be revealed, not only to us, but in us.

### GLORY REVEALED TO AND IN US

In other words, it is not that we are simply going to see glory – future glory is not simply a place, though Heaven and Earth will be overflowing with the glory of God. But this glory will include us and therefore, the future glory will be revealed *in* us. We are the crowning jewel of creation and in our redemption, Jesus says we will "shine like the sun" in Matthew 13:43.

We will see the glory as it is revealed *to* us, but we will also recognize that our faithful suffering in this life, the way we respond to things outside our control, the way we put off the old self and put on Christ, denying our flesh, the way we yield ourselves to Christ in service to other people, how we respond to medical diagnoses and financial setbacks, how we seek first the kingdom of God with our possessions, trusting Him with all of these things is going to be revealed for what it truly is - glorious.

### THIS IS THE HOPE OF REDEMPTION

Paul once again returns to the theme of hope in **verses 24-25. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.**

The ultimate hope of the Christian is the redemption of our bodies to eternal life. It's not in the temporal relief from suffering, though we thank the Lord when those come. It's not in the healing of our bodies, which will ultimately perish. Our hope is not in anything we can see in this life, **for who hopes for what he sees?** This requires that we **wait for it with patience.**

This is the hope of the gospel. Our life is not meaningless. Our suffering is not futile. Our grief and our mourning, our groaning and every tear that falls is not without meaning. Jesus said, *"In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."* John 16:33

### COME TO ME ALL WHO ARE WEARY

Jesus invites you to come to Him with all your burdens, with all your shame, with all your sin and find grace and forgiveness. Yes, at one decisive moment in your life...has that ever happened for you? Have you ever submitted yourself to Christ and trusted in Him for forgiveness? Yes, in one moment of time Jesus invites you to come, but also in every moment of time thereafter. Jesus invites you to abide in Him, to trust Him, to lean upon him, to hope in Him, to find your security and purpose and identity in Him.

To the suffering, the heart-broken, the lonely, the anxious, the beaten down, the tired, the frustrated, the angry, the abused, the beleaguered, to the mom who churns and churns but sees so little progress in her kids, to the man who battles the same addiction for decades, to the teen who feels unrelenting pressure to conform to the world, to the woman who lost her husband, to the couple who just can't seem to click no matter how much they try to convince themselves they love each other, to the person who looks back on their life with incredible guilt and regret, to the father who works two jobs to make ends meet and still comes up short, to the cancer patient who is holding out hope for a cure, to the weary worker, to you and to everyone else...

*"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. And he who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.'" Revelation 21:4-5*

I said earlier that you can compare a thimble to the water of the seas. I did the math; the seas hold about 86 Million-Trillion thimbles of water. Compared to our suffering, our future glory is infinitely greater than that, so much so it's beyond compare.

So, eyes up weary traveler, straighten you back, your redemption, and your redeemer, draws near.

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