THE GLORY THAT IS TO BE REVEALED TO US

Romans 8:18–30

Key Verse: 8:18

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

How does suffering affect you? Does it make you feel depressed? Or like you’re being punished? Do you try to keep suffering out of your life at all costs? Rich people try, spending lots of money. In today’s passage Paul deals with the topic of suffering. He shows us how to think about it. He also paints a much bigger picture of what God is doing in the world and in our lives. It’s one of the Bible’s most glorious passages. We want to learn from Paul how to live in this fallen world with the hope of glory God has for us. May God open our hearts and speak to us personally through his word today.

In verse 18 Paul uses the expression “the sufferings of this present time.” Then in the rest of the passage he develops what this might be. But in verse 17 he first urged us to “suffer with [Christ]”. He meant to go through all the sufferings required of a Christian: self-denial, carrying our cross, sacrificing for others, then being despised, rejected and persecuted for following Jesus by faith. Like our Lord Jesus, Christians go through the heartache and anguish of trying to help the people we truly care for to believe in him and taste God’s grace.

But in verse 20 Paul also uses the word “futility.” In verse 21 he adds “bondage to corruption.” In verse 22 there’s the metaphor of “the pains of childbirth.” He mentions the “groanings” three times (22,23,26), “our weakness” in verse 26 and “all things” in verse 28—which could include illnesses, accidents, tragedies, injustice, oppression, violence, cruelty and abuse. Like Paul, we also suffer in “this body of death” working to hold us as slaves of sin (7:14–25).

But there’s more. We suffer the loss of loved ones. We suffer from the meaninglessness of life. We suffer under the curse, struggling so hard just to barely survive. Then there’s the chronic body pain, the emotional stress, the exhaustion, the family troubles, and various kinds of betrayal. On top of it all is Satan’s work, who’s always trying to plant doubt and fear and get us to give up. We suffer from sadness and loneliness, weeping and anger, even feelings of bitterness. These sufferings aren’t just words or theory; they’re very real. People who haven’t suffered very much can never understand. But our Lord Jesus can, because he was “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isa53:3) He never minimizes or belittles our sufferings; he was made like us in every respect, suffered temptation as we do and can sympathize with our weaknesses (Heb2: 17,18; 4:15). Paul himself knew these sufferings firsthand and appreciated how all believers in some way are going through them.

But what do we do? Read verse 18. It all starts with how we think. Paul says “I consider.” It means not to get emotional or focus on the immediate problems, but to see the big picture. What is it? It’s “the glory that is to be revealed to us.” We can’t see it now. Right now, as Jesus’ followers we can feel and even look kind of pathetic. But this glory is going to be “revealed.” It’s as real as our sufferings. God himself is going to intervene and send our Lord Jesus back to this world to gather his elect from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven (Mk13:27). It’s God’s promise, and he’s going to keep it. As Paul just said in verse 17, if we suffer with Christ we’re going to be glorified with him someday. He writes in 2 Corinthians 4:17, “For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory *beyond all comparison*…” Here in verse 18 he says that our sufferings now “are not worth comparing with” this glory. It means the glory is so much greater, the sufferings aren’t even worth mentioning. When we suffer we tend to look back and regret. But Paul urges us here to look by faith to the future. In verse 18 the verb “is to be” revealed is literally “is about to be” revealed—meaning it’s more immediate than we realize. It’s like a wakeup call.

To help us, Paul goes on. Look at verse 19. In Greek it literally says, “For the eagerly expecting creation awaits eagerly the revelation of the sons of God.” That’s a lot of eagerness! In verses 19–23 Paul mentions “the creation” five times, and one time he writes “the whole creation.” He’s talking about the heavenly bodies, the lands and seas and rivers, the mountains, the vegetation and all creatures on earth. It’s amazing! In some sense, they’re all eagerly expecting and eagerly awaiting the day when God reveals who his children are. We may feel insignificant and forgotten, but to all creation God’s suffering people are so important. It’s something we can know only by faith.

Look at verses 20,21. Here Paul is referring to when God cursed the ground after Adam’s sin (Ge3:17). The futility was that it started producing thorns and thistles when people planted good seed. It required much harder work for worse results. All creation became in bondage to corruption. Death and decay entered the world, with all their attending effects. It was not how God originally made the world. But God had a hope to one day set creation free from this futility and corruption and bring it back to the freedom of the glory of his children. It points to the new heaven and new earth God promises he will one day create. Revelation 21:4 says, “He will wipe 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.” All creation is looking forward to that day.

Read verse 22. The whole creation is groaning together as in the pains of childbirth. It’s like a labor and delivery room full of groaning women! The groaning is painful but also hopeful, looking forward to the time when a precious new baby is born. Our Lord Jesus himself taught us to see the sufferings of the world like this (Mk13:8b). Without God’s hope, the world looks like it’s writhing in fits of meaningless suffering, with no end and no point. But with God’s hope it all makes sense, and it all has a glorious end in sight.

Read verse 23. Here Paul mentions groaning again. Creation is groaning, and we believers also join in. But it’s not complaining fellowship; it’s *hopeful* groaning. It seems the Holy Spirit within us helps us to groan inwardly like this. Just like creation, as we groan we too “wait eagerly.” What for? Paul writes, “…for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.” He’s talking about our resurrection. He says it’s something we believers wait for, like adoptees and adoptive parents have to wait quite a while for the legal process to be finalized. It’s so hard to wait, but we wait eagerly for it. Actually, in the Spirit we already experience right now the grace and love of God our Father who’s adopted us as his own children (8:15,16). But in a sense we’re all still waiting for our adoption to be finalized, when God redeems our bodies from death and gives us, as it says in verse 21, “the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” With our new resurrection bodies we going to get to enjoy God’s presence forever in his kingdom as his dearly loved children.

Read verses 24,25. Only this hope of being fully adopted as God’s children with resurrection bodies can save us. Paul also describes here the nature of hope. Generally speaking, hope always involves something unseen. But it doesn’t make the hope any less real. We shouldn’t think negatively that we can’t see any sign of our hope. We should hold onto our hope in God, even though we can’t see it, and wait for it with patience. In Greek the word “patience” is the same as “endurance.” It reminds us of what Paul wrote in 5:3,4: “Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope…” Hope enables us to rejoice but also to endure and produce a good outcome. When we put our hope in God by faith, he uses our sufferings to deepen our godly character so that his hope can become even more real to us. Only people who’ve gone through sufferings by faith and grown in godliness can have this hope and wait for it with patient endurance.

Paul mentions something else. Read verse 26. Here, “our weakness” can mean our human limitations, as well as all kinds of sicknesses and infirmities both physical and spiritual. We Christians should all be strong in our faith and hope, but Paul knows firsthand how weak we all really are. He’s not teaching us to endure our sufferings with human willpower and Stoic asceticism. He’s showing us how to endure our sufferings by depending on the Holy Spirit within us and learning how to pray. Honestly, when we’re suffering, we often don’t know what to say to God in prayer, or what we could possibly say. Sometimes we just groan. But that’s okay, because that might just be the Spirit helping us express our agonies to God. We may have no clue what to ask God for, but God knows our hearts, and he also knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for us according to the will of God (27). These words about the Spirit’s helping us in our weakness make sense only to people who are experiencing utter helplessness in the pain of sufferings.

In the last part Paul concludes by pointing us to the sovereignty of God in our lives. Read verse 28. It’s rare for Paul to mention those who “love God.” We don’t let our sufferings make us bitter toward God; we keep loving him anyway, because he’s poured out his love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (5:5). This gives us the assurance that “all things are working together for good” for us, because God has called us according to his purpose. Verse 28 is a great statement of what living by faith means. “All things” includes every kind of suffering we could possibly go through in this fallen world. It’s hard to understand at the moment why God allows these sufferings in our lives. They’re often too painful even to mention. We grieve over our sufferings and can feel so lost and confused and alienated. But we know that God is living and sovereign over all things. As Joseph told his brothers, “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good…” (Ge50:20a). God’s sovereignty over all things and people and his good purpose give us hope in the midst of sufferings.

Paul goes on. Read verse 29. Here he’s describing being “conformed to the image of his Son.” It’s like God is the Great Sculptor using a hammer and chisel to mold us into the glorious image of his Son, and his tools are the sufferings in our lives. Through our sufferings God is not punishing us. He’s already forgiven all our sins through our faith in Jesus. Instead, he’s molding us. It’s the greatest hope, the greatest glory that we get to be conformed to the beautiful image of our Lord Jesus. Our Lord Jesus is so humble, so compassionate, more glorious than we could ever express, and God is working in our lives to make us more like him.

Read verse 30. Paul again mentions “predestined.” God “foreknew” us and “predestined” us to share in the glory of Christ. Paul again emphasizes God’s sovereign will—he’s the one who called us and justifies us through faith in Christ, and he’s the one who will one day glorify us. We need to see his will and trust God who began a good work in us and will carry it on to completion (Php1:6).

Read verse 18 again. May God newly inspire us with the hope of glory to endure all our present sufferings.