

“SUFFERING”

- Romans 8:17-39

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Romans 8:17 – 28 “...and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. 18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. 19

For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; 21 because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. 23 Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. 24 For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance. 26 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. 27 Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. 28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

The text of Romans chapter 8 tells us that the price of sin has now been paid and we have been given the position of “adopted children of God.” Thus it is easy to embrace the concept of inheritance in areas of blessing, financial stability and physical well-being. But in reality our inheritance as His kids are both *in His blessing and in His suffering*. We are “heirs” now; inheritors of many of the attributes and yes even the *sufferings* of our Lord...our *Father and Creator*. We are now called to be a “family,” and we share in the family glory, (fully manifest after Christ returns) as well as the communal suffering.

This aspect of suffering is vastly misunderstood or often ignored by the church today. We want all the blessings and joy that God has to dish out, but, *of course*, without the expense. The church for generations has been chanting the mantra “Christianity is a free gift.” And indeed it is in the strictest use of that phrase. But the principle that we cannot *earn* our redemption or able to *purchase* it has been culturally expanded to encompass numerous other aspects of Christianity and has erroneously been applied to multiple facets of our faith until a real and living faith become something that is to be never hard, never persecuted, always worldly rewarding and always feels good. The practice of such no longer requires any personal discipline, time, effort or exclusive sacrifice. We just cling white knuckled to that false ideal... “*it’s all God man!*” *He did it all, He does it all! I can’t add anything so I don’t even try! In fact, it would be nearly blasphemous for me to get involved!*” Never mind that scripture teaches literally the opposite of that. But when churches seldom if ever actually teach the scriptures, no one ever really seems to notice.

Suddenly then we have two different kinds of churches...both taking upon themselves the moniker of “Christian.” One that is persecuted for their position and activities, and who see what they are doing as a life and death war, and a second one that is “happy-go-lucky,” secularly embraced and supported, easy and palatable, slick and entertaining. And most of all, the latter invariably paints an “it’s all free” public persona. But the fact is, *trials and tribulations* come with living in God’s kingdom. However it’s easy for a pastor to simply avoid this aspect of the Christian life in order to paint an inviting picture. Why *wouldn’t* people choose “door number 2” once they are presented with the two options? Make note: trials will come inside or outside of this new redemptive family. The choice is simply who you want at your side when they come. “*In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and on the unjust, too.*” Matt 5:45



Often when Christianity is spoken of, it is presented as a great deal. “*My yoke is easy, and my burden is light,*” Jesus says in Matthew 11:30. But other times, it sounds like Christianity is costly. Remember that Jesus *also* says “*he who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me*” (Matthew 10:38). So which view is right? Both of them.

In Matthew 13:44-46 we read: *The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.*

The first image is of a treasure buried in a field. The man who finds this treasure stows it away, and then gives up *everything he has* to buy the field that possesses it. Notice two things. First, buying the field costs the man everything he has. It is easy to see the field as the church...the Christian community. Again, the truth of the matter is that our salvation *IS* free in the context of you can't earn it or buy it. But it isn't without cost and expense. It cost Jesus plenty...even his very life! And the bottom line for us...at the risk of causing a stampede to the nearest church exit, is that it will, like the man in the story, cost you and me *everything*. God wants it all and He isn't negotiating or cutting deals. He wants all of you...He wants your whole life. He wants all of your time and all of your talents and all of your money. (No...I didn't say the church wants all of your money even if you may have thought you heard that.) He not only *wants* these things, it is part of the relational package. Fear keeps us from such “all in the pool” mentality because faith and trust in God to give back to us what we need and usually a whole lot more is absent from the consideration.

The second thing to see in this parable is it's still a steal. Even though he gives everything, the man in this parable is getting the land for cheap. Jesus is describing Christianity as an incredible deal, so good that He's basically saying that we're ripping God off. Look at what we get out of the deal, and look at what He gets!

So what can we take from this? You could say that Christianity is a bargain, but it still costs everything you have. Or to put it another way, Christianity costs everything you have, but it's still a bargain. The Christian life really does require us to give up everything that we have to follow Christ. For some of us, that might literally mean giving up:

- **the promotion**, because it requires you to work on Sundays or to spend too much time away from your church family; or
- **the boyfriend**, because he's pressuring you to do things contrary to the faith;
- **the promise of having a wife and kids**, because He's calling us to committed service or missional life;
- **the comfort of popularity**, because our friends are a bad influence; or simply
- **our self-centeredness**, as we are daily asked to put others in front of ourselves when we really don't want to.

We can and often do choose to look on all of this negatively. But we can also choose to look at it as the most amazing investment imaginable. Just consider. Imagine if you had a time machine, and could go back and invest in Apple or Microsoft or one of those companies when it was just starting. Chances are, you'd gladly give up all of your money, you'd struggle to make ends meet, putting every spare dollar into buying more and more stock in the company, knowing that one day, these short-term sacrifices would make you extremely wealthy. And that's just for *money*, just for this life. Christianity contains the certain promise of so much more. Give up everything you have to follow Christ, and you'll gain *eternal* fulfillment and happiness.

And what's even better is that this investment gains dividends now. It's not that you'll get eternal life but you have to live a terrible life now. Even if that *were* true, would it not be worth it? Trading a few decades of unhappiness for unending billions of decades of bliss would be a great deal. But the truth, God is the author of human nature. He knows what will truly fulfill us *both* in eternity *and* here and now.

And this is what's revealed in the second of the parables that Jesus uses. He compares the Kingdom of Heaven to a Pearl of Great Price, but more importantly, he compares you and I to "a merchant in search of fine pearls." In other words, it's not just that the Kingdom of Heaven is valuable in some objective sense. It's that it's the fulfillment of what you and I have been searching for our whole lives. The fulfillment that we crave, and that we do anything to gain, that's the happiness God is promising us. *That's the pearl.*

Verse 18: *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*

This is the heart and attitude of the believer which understands that if we must suffer, at least it is for a reason and worth the journey. Again, it seems today's believer wants the privileges of inheritance while avoiding the responsibilities of being a son. We want Dad to take care of us and provide for our needs, but we want to avoid cleaning our room and doing our chores! (but we still want our weekly allowance, right?) The truth be told, there are some believers who will fight tooth and nail against relenting in this way.

"For our present troubles are quite small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us an immeasurably great glory that will last forever!" 2 Cor 4:17

Our text (vs 18) says that the "glory of God" is to be revealed in us. Certainly this holds true in the eternal realm which is yet to come. But as I have said, we need not wait until then to get a glimpse of the future. Because one of the main points that Paul is making in this book, is that such "glory of God" *can and should be* being manifested in our lives *today*, as we grow and mature in the Spirit of God. The "glory of God" is to be a growing reality in our lives on this earth!

Verses 19-21 *"For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God."*

NLT renders this passage as: *"For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay."*

We have already learned, and are reminded once again, that until that final and ultimate day when we are completely "new creatures," both body *and* soul, we still have this flesh body to deal with. But the playing field has changed, as born again we are now once again "Spirit controlled" as a reborn believer! We are no longer dead, but now *alive*. It is a taste of things to come!

And how we anxiously wait to be freed from the last connection to the world and Adam's sin! The last increments of the old man will be gone in that day. We will be wholly manifested a perfect creation. Verse 19 says we will be "revealed" like a work of art; like the unveiling of perfection. Verse 20 says that mankind now is subjected to "*futility*"- ("vanity": KJV) This means devoid of truth and this for a species full of depravity.

It should come as no surprise when I says that the earth we live in is fallen. It's breaking down in its corrupt form, and even the most secular pagan and spiritually cynical individual find it hard to deny this. Verse 21 speaks of a "bondage of corruption." We are under the captivity of deterioration...the sentence of death. Such a truth must therefore change how we think of the earth we live upon. "Save the whales" starts to sound a bit hollow. Because we're dying' out here.

Verse 22 says creation is "groaning." Can there be any argument on this? Both man and nature seems to be unraveling around us. Mankind is cracking up corporately and individually. Mental health providers are buried under the avalanche of need as we turn from one relief to another, while both the pharmaceuticals and the basement "cookers" are getting rich. The earth is shaking, melting, and burning and species after species are disappearing from the face of the earth.

8:23-25 says “*Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.*”

Even the children of God can clearly relate as we are frustrated and even angered at ourselves for our spiritual shortcomings. Like Paul the apostle, we want to scream when we want to do right and yet we fail. By the time we grow old, there is a side of us that welcomes our release from these bodies as we anxiously desire to “move on” to the promised perfection...*mind, soul, and body!*

Verse 24 says “We were saved in this hope.” **Hope** there is a “*confident expectation of obtaining.*” We can despair waiting for the inevitable end of the world, or we can live in eager anticipation of our “liberation.” But there is a required patience between us and our goal, that’s why Paul is always trying to teach us patience. There will be no shortcuts. We must travel the path, but how will that journey play out? Shall we do it with joy and strength, or a whimper and whine?

8:26-27 says “*Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.*”

Ah! Herein lies our grace! The truth is that we will fail to ever make the journey without the Lord’s help. So he has sent us the Holy Spirit to bridge the daily “gap” between who we know we are practically and the *positional standing* where God has inexplicably placed us. It’s been said that “Prayer is the divine *in* us, appealing to the divine *above* us.” The truth is that we really don’t know what is good for us. We can’t see the future, and we don’t really know where we are going.

NOTE: All three members of the trinity are represented here, furthering our Biblical understanding of a triune God. By possessing the Holy Spirit, we have someone to intervene on our behalf before God. Just like in the issue of salvation, God takes it upon Himself to do what we cannot do ourselves. The Spirit makes this “intercession” for us “*according to the will of God.*” That’s good, because most of the time, we don’t know what that is. Jesus “searches our hearts” for the reality of who we really are, and He knows what the Spirit wants for us, and then intercedes with God to see how He can make such a reality in us practically.

8:28 says: “*And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*”

This is the mountain top of spiritual promises. The crescendo of the symphony that is our daily walk in Christ. This is the “I’m still standing” position when we feel like everything is falling apart. And there is only one pre-requisite for this: *that we love God.* That’s it. No hoops, no forms, no university classes. Just love God. It’s the bottom line of our faith. Yet many professed believers have never known this state of life that we have been addressing here. And out of a sheer fear of catastrophic collapse of our current perceived position in the grand scheme of things, we shun the asking of that eternity determining question: “*Do I really love Him?*”

I’m “called according to **HIS** purpose.” To accept His will, purpose, and plan for my life, I must be fully and absolutely sold out. There must be love between us. *His* love is guaranteed and unconditional. Is mine? Am I “all in” or am I spending my time trying to find a road of compromise...trying to “cut a deal” with God as to the control of my life? Imagining...hoping...searching, for another road to peace and eternity...