

“BY THE SPIRIT, SUFFERING WITH CHRIST.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Romans 8:16-18

Introduction.

We are making progress here in Romans 8. God continues to pour out His love for us by giving us His Holy Spirit who dwells in our hearts, enabling us to walk according to the Spirit. This path is the path of sanctification, of being conformed to the image and likeness of Jesus.

By the Spirit we have the Spirit of adoption and are sons of God, able to cry Abba, Father. By the Spirit we are heirs of God, fellow heirs of Christ and destined for glory. There it is, the final piece in the puzzle of salvation, glorification. That is the goal, the grand object of our salvation. We are making progress.

We ended last week talking about inheritance and I realized talking about inheritance to a bunch of rich Americans doesn't have the same appeal as it did to Paul's hearers. Do you think about being heirs of God and what that means? Can you imagine how well off you will be?

Romans 8:16-17 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

These two verses start out wonderfully but then there is a stinger at the end.

It starts out with the glorious truth if we belong to Christ then we have the Spirit of adoption which makes us children of God, and if we are children of God, then along with all the good things children receive from their parents (instruction, discipline, guidance, provision and protection, love) they also receive an inheritance.

We will inherit God Himself as our Father. We will inherit all that is God's, His grace, His love, His wisdom, His righteousness, His eternal life.

All things that belong to the Father, belong to Christ, and all who belong to Christ receive all that belongs to Him. We will inherit with Christ resurrection bodies and all the glories of heaven.

Jesus prayers for this

John 17:22-24 The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ... 24 Father, I desire that they also... may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

It will be better than any possible inheritance on earth, and better than all the enticements and treasures of the world.

So if being adopted as sons of God and being made children of God and heirs of God and Christ is such a great and glorious reality, what about all the trials and troubles in this life? “God, I thought I was your child, is this the way you treat your kids?” Do we start to question if we are children of God when we experience any suffering?

This brings us to the scary part of this promise.

“If we suffer with him ... we may also be glorified with him.”

There is the stinger, the catch, some fine print. To be co-heirs with Christ means to be united with Christ, which means to share in a life like Christ's, a life that follows a path of suffering on to glory.

Christ received His inheritance by way of the cross, and the servant is not above the master, the sons of God are not above the Son of God.

When we hear something like this, we want to know what kind of suffering? How bad will it be? Remember when Jesus told Peter he would suffer and what did Peter say? What about John? And Jesus said don't look at others, that has nothing to do with you, you don't know why God is doing what He is doing in someone else.

Please hear this, suffering in whatever form it takes, is the normal Christian life. The comfort and ease and convenience of the American lifestyle blinds us or makes us insensitive to this reality. Suffering is God's ordained and chosen path for our Christian life, it is given by God from God for God.

You don't get to choose your suffering, the Holy Spirit knows the exact kind you need. God out of His love causes His children to suffer in a vast variety of difference ways. Some suffer because of families, some because of children, some because of jobs, health,

internal things, sin, bad decisions, good decisions that go bad, some because of others sin and evil, natural disasters.

Do you want to be safe and not suffer? Do you want to know a hack for getting around suffering, for an easier life? Don't follow Jesus. Whatever you do don't let the Holy Spirit into your life because He is going to mess things up. All suffering is the normal Christian life.

No cross, no crown. No suffering, no inheritance. No pain, no gain.

We have just watched two non-stop weeks of the triumph of gain over pain, two weeks of testimonies to suffering leading to glory. No pain, no gain. So tell me this, why do we say that everywhere else, but not in our Christian lives, not in the church?

God out of His love causes His children to suffer for so many different reasons.

For our good.

For the testing and trying of our faith, to teach us to pray.

For the teaching of patience and humility and compassion.

For the putting to death of our indwelling sin.

To wean our hearts from this world and loosen our grip on perishable worldly things.

To turn our eyes off the world, to stop being at home here.

To conform us more and more to the image and likeness of Christ.

To prepare us for heaven and its glories.

To make us to rely not on ourselves but on God (II Corinthians 1:8-9).

To make us take up our cross and die to ourselves (Luke 9:23).

To discipline those He loves and is treating us like sons (Hebrews 12:6-7).

If we have the honor of suffering with Him, we will have the honor of being glorified with Him. Jesus counted it His joy and honor to suffer for our sake, so we can count it all joy to suffer for Him (Romans 5:3-5; James 1:2-4).

All who suffer with Him and for Him, will receive the crown of life and eternal glory.

Having encouraged us to suffer with Christ with the consolation that we will be glorified with Christ, Paul encourages us with another promise.

Romans 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.

Someone might raise an objection. If the path to glory must pass through suffering, is it worth it? Does future glory really outweigh present suffering? What if the sufferings are bad, serious? Can we do some sort of cost/benefit analysis? Can we line up the pros and cons?

This is a daring claim, a bold statement. How can Paul say that?

Is Paul making light of our suffering, is he mocking our pain, is he saying we are lightweights, sissies, babies? Is he being dismissive of our difficulties? Is he saying our mountains are really just molehills, so cheer up, get over it?

Does Paul have any credentials to back this up?

This is Paul's personal testimony, "For I consider." Paul knew about suffering. He was well qualified to speak on this matter, he has all the credentials. Both as one who has suffered and as one who has seen glory.

Let's set up a scale and put Paul's suffering on the scale.

II Corinthians 11:23-28 Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. 24 Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; 26 on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; 27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28 And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

That's street cred.

Now let's put Paul's experience of glory on the other side of the scale.

Jesus gave Paul a vision when he was caught up into the third heaven and heard things no man can utter and saw revelations of surpassing greatness (II Corinthians 12).

Romans 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.

Let's set up a scale and weigh sufferings and glory.

Take the weight of all your trials, troubles, difficulties, pain, suffering, heartache, anxiety, all of it and put it on the scale.

Then add all the weight of all the pain and suffering in the world, all of it, all the sin, brokenness, death, tragedy, disasters, human suffering. Put it on the scale.

Take every ounce of suffering that every one of God's children has experienced or endured on earth through all human history and place that on one side of the scale. Then take five minutes of heaven and place it on the other side of the scale. In the first five minutes of heaven every tear will be wiped away.

The suffering on the one side will be like bits of dust compared to the solid gold bars of glory on the other side. It is not even worth comparing.

Revelation 21:1-4 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. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 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."

What is of earth is nothing compared to what is of heaven.

What is of the present time is nothing compared to what is of eternity.

What is finite is nothing compared to what is infinite.

What is seen is nothing compared to what is unseen but will be revealed.

Suffering ain't nothin compared to glory. There is a vast difference between the glory to come and the present suffering. The difference between one minute and a million years, between a penny and a billion dollars, between a grain of sand and the whole earth.

Preserve and endure knowing there is no comparison between our worst afflictions and our future glory. There has never been a suffering from which God has not brought good. There is nothing more glorious than to suffer with humility, patience, knowing a sense of God-appointedness, of God's purposefulness.

Don't lose sight of the fact that this present life is very short, a shadow, a mist, a fleeting puff of smoke, like the flower that is here today and gone tomorrow. Our worst sufferings are finite.

Sufferings are limited to to this present life. They don't carry over, there is no purgatory or half-way house or probationary period. And all that we encounter, we never go through it alone, we are never without God's care, compassion, presence and support.

Suffering is real and suffering is painful and at times confusing, it messes with our head, heart and soul. It starts us asking questions, like why, and it stirs up anxiety, fear and doubt. How can a Christian who is suffering be saved from bitterness, revenge, fear, self-pity or self-indulgence?

One fundamental and foundational truth. God has promised again and again to turn "every sorrow to joy, every loss to gain, and every groan to glory" (John Piper).

II Corinthians 4:17-18 This light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

Hebrews 12:10 God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness!

I Peter 1:6-7 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

I Peter 4:12-13 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

This is all meant for our encouragement and peace and patience, and consolation that all our suffering comes to so great an end. Whatever was meant for evil, God meant for good and our glory.

Romans 8:35, 37, 39 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. [nothing] will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.