

***Romans 8, Pt. 2***

The seventeenth verse of chapter eight marks a transition point in Romans. In the first sixteen verses of the chapter, we considered the Spirit's work in the process of sanctification. He liberates us as we set our minds on him. He indwells us, opening up a world of possibility which would be impossible without him. He coaches us in our battle with sin, pacing us as we put to death the deeds of the flesh. The Spirit affirms that we are God's children. And as children, we are heirs of the glory that is to come. But verse seventeen reminds us that there is suffering before the full inheritance.

Can any of us question that this life is full of suffering? Suffering comes to all of us, no matter who we are or what we have done. One of my mentors and his family have traveled many places to serve God and his people - Illinois, West Virginia, Tanzania, and Kenya. Several years ago, his father passed away in a boating accident. The question struck me then - why? No forewarning. No time to pray for his recovery. He died in a manner and at a time that no one could expect. I assume that I need not ask you all to think long of other similar occurrences in your life or in the lives of those you know. **There is a glory coming, a glory that is beyond what we can conceive of. God promises that his people will get there. But before the full inheritance, there will be suffering. Let us break this passage down into three sections.**

**For now there is suffering, but glory is coming (18-22).** The world is not the way it is supposed to be. Such a statement is not a denial of God's sovereignty or goodness. It is simply a recognition that the Fall of Genesis 3 really happened and that it truly had terrible consequences. Paul piles up the words in chapter eight to show us that the creation is under duress because of our sin. It is "subjected to frustration" (v. 20). It is in "bondage to decay" (v. 21). It is "groaning as in the pains of childbirth" (v. 22). There is a principle of entropy in the world. One of my favorite novels borrows a title from the work of William Butler Yeats - *Things Fall Apart*. Chinua Achebe's novel tells the story of a West African man named Okonkwo who loses control of

his life under the advent of British colonialism. The entrance of the British puts external pressure on the internal pressure that already existed in the Igbo culture. Things begin unraveling. And isn't that just how it works? Things are wrong inside of us, in our relationships, and in our communities. And then something happens. And all those points of stress are pressured in ways beyond our imagining.

Creation is aching. It longs to be free, and in its own proper way, it knows that freedom is coming. That freedom will happen at the same time as the "glorious freedom of the children of God." This is simple Biblical theology. The world was plunged into curse through the actions of humanity. The world will be freed from curse because of the full redemption of humanity. The Bible says that God made the world good, that human beings fell into sin, that Jesus came to redeem humanity, and that he will ultimately bring about a new creation. Creation will be restored, and creation is groaning for that day.

Don't be surprised by suffering. Expect it. Accept that this world is broken. Take responsibility for what you can. And, whatever you do, don't forget that glory is coming. There is a weight of glory headed our way. Let God's promise stoke the fires of hope within you.

**For now there is suffering, but God is accomplishing his purposes (23-30).** Creation is groaning, and so are we. It happens to all of us. We wake up in the middle of the night, and a limb or a back is hurting. Or maybe it is something other than physical pain. Maybe we just had a dream which disturbed us. Or maybe we feel the weight of anxiety pressing down upon us. This is all a testament to our groaning. Don't miss what Paul writes. He has already told us that we are children of God. He says that we have "the firstfruits of the Spirit" (v. 23). He says that we have been saved (in the past - v. 24). And yet, things are not yet what they will be in their fullness. We are children, but we await a fuller adoption. We are saved, but we await a fuller redemption. We wait in hope for the fulfillment of God's promises to us.

And as we are waiting, God is working out his purposes. There are times when we don't know how to pray our way through the mess. But hear the promise - "The Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot

express.” The Holy Spirit lives inside of us and prays for us. According to v. 27, the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will. Listen - the Holy Spirit knows exactly what we need to move us toward what God has planned for us and for all of creation. There are times when the greatest prayer that you can offer is simply your silence, trusting that the Holy Spirit is praying you through to God’s blessings. He is an advocate for you. He knows what you need when you don’t. The turning of the year reminds us that tax time is coming. When I was a young guy, I could do my taxes without assistance. But now that life is rather more complicated, I can’t do taxes on my own. I need assistance, not just to fill out the forms, but to even know what form to fill out and what exemption to take. The Holy Spirit doesn’t want you to try and figure things out on your own. He is with you, for you, and in you.

And this gets us to the glorious truth of v. 28 - “God works all things for good, for those who love him and have been called according to his purpose.” The “all things” here is inclusive and testifies to a truth that we cannot accept outside of the realm of faith. Note that these things are not good in and of themselves, but God works them towards the good. God wants us to be conformed to the image of Jesus (v. 29), and he knows how to get us there. The words of vv. 28-30 have sometimes been called the “golden chain.” For God’s people, the truth is certain - we are foreknown, predestined, called, justified, and glorified. Notice how Paul here presents our future glory as if it were already accomplished. Indeed, from the perspective of faith trusting in God’s power, it is as good as done.

**For now there is suffering, but nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ (31-39).** No preacher can do justice to the closing verses of chapter eight. There is much suffering in this life, Paul names many sources of suffering - condemnation, trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, even death. But none of it is strong enough to take Jesus away from us or us away from Jesus. God will not fail to bring us into glory. We are “more than conquerors” (v. 37). But notice that we will not conquer in our own strength or through our own resources. We will only conquer “through him who loved us.” We have to have the faith like Abraham that trusts God to bring about what seems impossible.

Applying these soaring verses of chapter eight involves in part, a renouncing of all of our plans for self-salvation or self-vindication. Much of our suffering in life is the consequence of us trying to get a hold of our problems and figure things out on our own. More than once I have sabotaged what God was doing in my life by coming up with my own plans. Several years ago, the Lord had opened up a door of service for my family and I to have a ministry in rural Missouri. Instead of trusting God's provision and listening to the counsel of Shana, I pursued a different call that I thought better fit my plans for my life. This led us to four years of uncertainty, frustration, and scrambling to secure ourselves through the midst of constant irritations and setbacks. I did not feel like I was more than a conqueror. Instead, I often felt conquered. I do not want to paint a sad picture here. I believe I did something against the Lord's leading, but God is still the one who works all things together for the good of those who love him. He brought about growth, blessing, and opportunity even in that wrong path. Recognizing my error did not require going backwards. It simply required listening to the Lord and moving forward with him right from the place where I was. God has been faithful. But the point is that we must never forget that crucial little addition to the phrase - "more than conquerors *through him*."

We must have faith in God's power and God's love. We must listen to what he is saying in Holy Scripture. We must bear our hearts to him in prayer. We must do the Lord's work in the Lord's way. There will be days ahead in which you feel lost in the mess of life, in which you don't believe the "all things" of v. 28 could really mean *all* things, in which you think something might separate you from Christ's love. These days of doubt will come. But you will never be free from the burden of them if you back away from the Lord and try to fix the problem yourself. Instead, you must take account of where you are and simply walk by whatever light God gives you, one step at a time. He who has already given Christ for us won't fail to lead us into the coming glory.