

Romans 8:18-22 (NKJV)

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.

Context is probably the most important principle in Bible interpretation. So it is always important to frame the current text in its surrounding context.

Let's review what is true of the man in Christ up to this point.

I am going to quote Martin Lloyd Jones because his review would be hard to improve upon.

We are already delivered from the tyranny and the dominion of sin, we have "died with Christ", we are "dead to sin", we "dead to the law". We are no longer under the dominion of sin. We have been told in chapter 6 verse 11, "Reckon you also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord". In spirit we are already in Christ and safe. We died with Him, we have been buried with Him, we have risen with Him, we are "seated with Him in the heavenly places" at this very moment. There is no question about that; it is certain, it is absolutely sure. We are saved, we are secure, but we are not yet glorified. What then is our relationship to glorification? We have glimpses of it, we have intimations of it. We are given the privilege of tasting something of its first-fruits, we are given a foretaste of it. Not yet glorified, but knowing about it; seeing it afar off, being prepared for it. In a glorious statement at the end of the third chapter of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, verse 18, the Apostle puts it thus, "We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are being changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord". That is our present position. The glorification is yet to come. We are justified, we are being sanctified, we are going to be glorified. That is the way to look at the matter. And therefore, "We rejoice in hope of the glory of God.". We know enough about it to look forward to it, to rejoice in it, to anticipate it. We do not understand it fully, we shall not even be given a full description of it in this passage that is before us. However the Apostle tells us enough for us to

realize that it is something that really baffles description. “We rejoice in hope of the glory of God”. Sin remains in the body, this mortal body of ours, and we have to mortify the deeds of the body, as we have been reminded already in verse 13 of this chapter. “If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.” There is still a fight, there is still a struggle, and the body itself is decaying and dying. This is not glorification; this is the process of sanctification preparatory to the entry into the state of eternal glorification. Such is the present position of the Christian.”

End quote.

Then in verses 14-17 we have 4 more proofs we are heading toward glorification.

14- We are being led by the Spirit of God.

15- We have lost the spirit of bondage and now we have the Spirit of adoption whereby we call out to God as our Father.

16- The Spirit bears witness with our spirits experientially that we are God’s children.

And verse 17- We suffer as a Christian.

We left off at verse 17. Verse 17 brought in the topic of suffering in relationship to being a child of God. Verses 18-23 talk about suffering in relationship to glorification. Look at the flow of thought here. We are children of God. Being a child of God will include suffering. Suffering must be seen in the light of glorification.

Paul was a compassionate pastor. He cared about the sheep he tended to. He did not want them to be taken by surprise by life’s events in such a way that their faith would be harmed. So suffering has to be discussed. And that is what he is doing in our current text.

Notice how he deals with it. He doesn’t say, “If you suffer.” He doesn’t say, “You might suffer.” The assumption here and in the rest of scripture is that YOU WILL SUFFER. If you name the name of Christ in a world that hates Christ, their hatred will be directed toward you. You will suffer from outside forces. If you want to live a holy life in a human body cursed by sin, you will suffer inwardly in that struggle. If you care about the family of God, their pains will become your pains. And that is all above and beyond the suffering from the consequences of sin that face every child of Adam on this planet.

So the question we should start with this morning is- How should a Christian regard suffering?

Before we answer that, let's look at our histories. How have we handled suffering in the past? If we suffered this week, how did we handle it? How did we think about it?

Are we surprised when we must suffer? Do we think that being a Child of God should somehow eliminate suffering from our lives? Do we think that we should not be asked to suffer like we are too special, or too weak, or too important to handle such a thing? Paul never spoke such a thing. Paul never set up his disciples for such unrealistic expectations. He, along with all the other New Testament writers told his listeners that they WILL suffer and he saw it as his job to tell them how to think about it.

This morning we will look at what Paul says about how to think about suffering. And I believe this is one of those truths where we must abandon our natural impulses and accept this revelation from the Holy Spirit through the pen of Paul. This should become the foundation that we build on for our ministry to each other as we suffer. If we resort to other methods, we will destroy faith while we are trying to minister to believers. Ministering to Christians when they suffer will cause us to suffer, being part of the body assures us that this will happen. And while we minister, we cannot allow faithless responses to continue. We must compassionately empathize and help our brothers and sisters think rightly at the same time as we empathize. And how to think correctly is what our brother Paul tells us this morning.

¹⁸ **For I consider** This is a word Paul uses repeatedly in Romans. In fact he uses a derivative of this word 15 times in Romans. The word is the same word used in

Romans 6:11 (NKJV)

11 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The word for consider or reckon is a mathematical word. It is a calculation, a proper deduction. Now, we have enough school teachers in this room to know there is one proper calculation and the rest are wrong. 2 plus 2 is 4 when reckoned correctly. If it is anything other than 4 it is reckoned incorrectly. So what Paul is telling us about suffering is that there is a right way for a child of God to think about suffering and all the other ways are wrong.

If we are facing suffering with other ways of thinking we are either acting ignorantly or rebelliously.

Another point to make here is that the key to Christian growth is found in reckoning correctly, thinking correctly. Most of the growth that we will experience in our Christian lives will not come from a zap by God. It won't be thrown on us like a spiritual blanket. No, most of it comes from moving from

reckoning our way to reckoning God's way, from believing lies to replacing those lies with truth, from doing what our flesh tells us we must do to doing what God tells us we must do. Proper preaching isn't formulated to make you FEEL a certain way. It is formulated to make us THINK a certain way. Your growth will happen, your sanctification will happen as you capture wrong thoughts and replace them with right thoughts. Then over time it will change how you generally feel. But feelings are illusive beasts. We are not told to take our feelings captive because we cannot do so. But if we will relentlessly obey, we will find that our feelings will come in line with our thinking. The problem we so often have is we think our feelings should guide our thoughts. Or we allow our thoughts to be shaped by our feelings. We feel tired and we say inwardly that my feeling grants the authority for me to sleep instead of work. We feel dismay so we say that our feelings grant us the right to think dismal thoughts. We feel agitated and we believe that grants us the right to strike out at those around us. Then we end up obeying our flesh when we should be putting its deeds to death. Spiritual growth comes from proper Godly reckoning. And scripture will tell us what that is. So how does Paul reckon? How should we face suffering?

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.

Here it is. Here is proper reckoning regarding suffering. The sufferings in this present time are light compared to the weight of glory. The word for worthy also means weighty. It is used in the context of weighing things of value where the weightier it is, the more value it has.

Paul is creating this kind of imagery. Imagine yourself in a room where a man is measuring gold. He has a scale. He asks us for all the gold we own. We give it to him. On one side he puts the tiny speck of gold we gave him. Then he announces to us what he will give us for that speck of gold. He comes out with a gold bullion. He puts that on the other side of the scale. The scale doesn't even hesitate. It just drops toward the ground as fast as the scale will allow it to go. Now we are asked, which would you prefer? Do you want the speck? Or do you want the bullion? At this point we all would reckon that the bullion is worth more than the speck. We would gladly give up the speck to get the bullion.

We also see this same reasoning later in **2 Corinthians 4:14-18 (NKJV)**

14 knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you.

15 For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.

16 Therefore we do not lose heart. (what should we be encouraged by? What thought should we think?) **Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.** (This is the work God is carrying out. He is renewing our inward man day by day. And how do we sometimes experience that?)

17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, (here it is again. Light affliction, heavy glory. And Paul makes the connection again that the affliction works toward glory. It is not useless or purposeless. It is not vain.)

18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

That is how we should think about suffering.

Now notice what Paul doesn't tell us. He doesn't try in any way to tell us that what we are experiencing really isn't suffering. He doesn't argue that if we were a good Christian it really wouldn't or shouldn't hurt. He doesn't play mind games by telling us that if we pretend the pain doesn't exist it will go away because it isn't real. No, there are lots of religions and cults that play that game. The bible does not do so.

It also doesn't tell us that suffering is just misery and there is no point to it. You suffer then you die, and you have to get whatever meaning out of life you can. But really suffering is just pointless. **No**, we don't need to believe those stoic philosophies. Our suffering is real and there is a point to them. They are in some way preparing us for glory.

Now this is the point where I would always overstep reason. I would conclude that, then, suffering is good. And that is a point that Mike was very passionate in refuting. And I am now just beginning to understand his point. Suffering is not intrinsically good, any more than evil is intrinsically good. In and of itself, suffering is a negative thing, not a good thing. But suffering, just like evil, can be used for a good purpose. So suffering is not **good**. But it may be **good** for us to suffer. There are some things that are so important to God that he will use suffering as a tool to accomplish those things in our lives. We will eventually get to the Romans 8:28 verse that says that all things work together for good to those who love God. But that does not mean that all things **are** good. Suffering will **work out** for our good. But that does not mean that suffering **IS** good. Suffering is not something that we should welcome or seek out as a virtue. Only a stupid person wants to suffer. There is something wacky about a person that thinks that

suffering is cool. But if we face suffering, Paul gives us the Holy Spirit mind fuel to process it properly. It is a **small thing** compared to a **greater** thing.

In world war II HG Wells said that either God has the power and does not care, or He cares but does not have the power. HG Wells did not know God. God **has the power** and God **cares**. But God is working out something for eternity. His ends are not here and now. His billions are given out **when time ends**. And He will surely prepare his children for that time and will use everything at his disposal toward that end. It is because suffering has a use that you will not find any promise in scripture that God will put an end to suffering during this age. There are many who present Christianity as a way to avoid suffering. These people do not read well. There is no such promise. There is no heaven on earth in this age and it is good that this is so. How easily we could become addicted to this world. How easily we could lose sight of the goal. We would abandon sanctification and lose the hope of glorification in our self-satisfaction. Paul does not cater to this myth. He simply tells us how to deal with suffering since suffering on this sinful planet is assumed.

Note also that the suffering and the reward cannot be compared. They are always contrasted. They are more different than the same. We face something that is light, short, momentary, to gain something that is valuable and eternal. These things cannot be compared. They are contrasted.

As we minister to each other we need to keep this in mind. It is right to empathize with the suffering our brothers and sisters experience. Our hearts should go out to those who hurt. Christ's did. He had every right answer, but right answers did not keep him from empathizing with those who suffered. Truth doesn't remove pain. Right answers don't remove suffering. Suffering is real and it hurts. We should never encourage someone to deny that they are suffering. When we do that, we start messing with a person's sanity. But at the same time we should not cater to lies in the life of a believer. When a believer starts saying or believing things about God that are not true, we do well to correct those things as lovingly as we can. Still we cannot gauge the effectiveness of our ministry by the status of the suffering. Sometimes we may be able to lighten the load. Sometimes we cannot. Sometimes we may be able to make someone feel better. Sometimes we cannot. But if we encourage our brothers and sisters to reckon correctly, if we encourage them that it is worth it to

hang in there, if we emphasize the weight in glory and the eternal perspective, we are then doing what Paul would have us do.

We also need to consider that the world looks on. One of the things that has been used very often by God to win people to himself is to have the world watch as Christians suffer. When Christians suffer and weigh the suffering properly, they glorify God in a way that God often uses to win people to himself. Their lives declare their faith in God. They say with their lives that their God is good. He will make it worth their while. He is a wonderful master. He has a plan and the believer trusts it. The child of God may not understand the suffering but he knows the character of his Savior. And he will simply not allow that to come into question. He will not remain in the murky waters of doubt and despair. He will believe and he will count that the bullion is worth a million times more than the speck.

But if we throw up our hands in surprise like something is completely unexpected in the Christian's life,

or if we act like our God must not be good anymore because he has caused us to suffer,

or if suddenly we suddenly think that God's character is in question because we are asked to carry a weight we do not prefer,

or if we become bitter toward God because we suffer,

we are essentially telling the world- My God is a liar.

He does not have my best in mind. He is not good. I cannot trust his purpose. I cannot trust his actions. I cannot trust his provision. In fact, I would prefer it if I could take care of all of it myself. And I will try my best to do so. What agony we create for ourselves when we add bitterness of the soul to agony of the body or of the mind.

If we quote scriptures to others, but throw them all away when we suffer, what effect do we think we will have? A person would be wise to find someone else to show them how to follow Christ.

Brothers and sisters, how will we suffer? Will we value the bullion, or will we cry about the speck? It is very clear what God's will is here. Will we trust and obey? Can God trust us with his purpose of allowing suffering to win others to himself? Or to allow suffering in our lives to deepen our ministry to others? Or to allow suffering for whatever God has in mind? Or will we turn on Him and malign Him when he allows suffering to fall upon us? Will it set us in a tailspin that will waste years of this life we have?

What does our history show? If it is bad, we can begin changing today by reckoning the way Paul reckoned.

of this present time-

A non believer only has one period of history. It is now. It is this lifetime. How pitiful a position they hold. How sad is their lot. They cannot have any meaning in suffering. They have no promises of God. There is no glory for them to make their suffering worthwhile. But Paul knows that is not true for a believer. A believer has two periods of time.

We have this present time or this present age, and we have the end of time and a new age that knows no time limits.

This end of time is not referring to when we die. That is not the end of time. God's people have died for 10,000 years now and we have not reached the end of time. But clearly there is an end in sight. The end is when Christ returns. We won't go in depth into that topic. That is something we need to study later in Romans. But what is being described here is a change that is complete and eternal. The bullion of glory will be received in a kingdom that will know no change. It will be the rule of Christ forever and ever. And it will be wonderful.

Before we go forward it is important to note that suffering and glory are words that are often used in the same sentence in scripture. They are related by both cause and effect.

Since we are Christ's, since we will be sharing His glory, we are also going to share in His sufferings. We will share in those because the world hated him and the world will hate us. That is what He said.

And since we are going to be glorified, Christ will use suffering to prepare us for that glory. If this life were perfect, believers would have a hard time weaning themselves from this world. Suffering serves as an aid to make the bullion look better and better. The Lord uses suffering to create character in us. Have you ever met a person who has suffered very little in their lives? They tend not to be incredibly useful. It is often the suffering we faithfully experience that causes us to be thoughtful and compassionate toward those who suffer. Our ministry of comfort to others is often the very place where we have suffered and needed comfort. So suffering is used as a tool in God's hand to shape us for the land without time.

be revealed in us.

Revealed is apokolypto and it means for something to be revealed that had not been revealed previously. It is very close to the word used in verse 19 where the creation also waits for the revealing of the sons of God. The revelation in this case

will be the biggest surprise godless man could possibly have. They in their pride have been wrong about everything that matters. And those they despised as fools will be at God's right hand in the judgment. Glory will be revealed. We will share in the glory of Christ as his joint heir. We will be vindicated as being children of God. And it will be clear to everyone what really mattered in life.

19 For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God.

This next truth is amazing. The fate of creation is solidly hooked to the fate of the children of God. Just as the earth was cursed when Adam fell, so the earth will be restored when all believers will be restored.

Lets look at a couple of scriptures that show that the earth truly will be restored. We often think we will live out eternity in heaven. But from scripture it appears more likely that we will inhabit a new earth and we will do it in new bodies.

There will be no more remnants of sin.

2 Peter 3:7-10 (NKJV)

7 But the heavens and the earth *which* are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

8 But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day *is* as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

9 The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

This is how the earth will be cleansed. Scripture does not say destroyed.

Isaiah 65:17 (NKJV)

17 "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.

Isaiah 11:4-9 (NKJV)

4 But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, And decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked.

5 Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, And faithfulness the belt of His waist.

6 "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, The leopard shall lie down with the young goat, The calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little

child shall lead them.

⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze; Their young ones shall lie down together; And the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

⁸ The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den.

⁹ They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea.

Psalm 102:25-26 (NKJV)

²⁵ Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens *are* the work of Your hands.

²⁶ They will perish, but You will endure; Yes, they will all grow old like a garment; Like a cloak You will change them, And they will be changed.

Isaiah 66:22 (NKJV)

²² "For as the new heavens and the new earth Which I will make shall remain before Me," says the LORD, "So shall your descendants and your name remain.

Matthew 19:28 (NKJV)

²⁸ So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Acts 3:19-21 (NKJV)

¹⁹ Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,

²⁰ and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before,

²¹ whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.

We can see from these verses that the earth is not going to be destroyed but it will be wiped clean of sinful residue and sinful inhabitants and will be re-inhabited with saints, those for whom the serpent would find no audience if he were not already thrown into hell.

At this point in Paul's text the creation is personified as a figurate of speech to make a point. Paul describes nature as a person who is earnestly expecting something. The word for earnest expectation is very loaded with meaning. It means to essentially stand on one's tiptoes with its gaze fixed in a direction where it is waiting for something that it can't wait to appear. It would be like a hunter in

the woods on a dry day hearing a deer approach as it walks through the dry leaves. The hunter has all his attention focused in that direction to see that deer as soon as it is possible. Or it is like one of those times you are waiting for special company and you keep craning your neck to see out the window if they are here yet. It is that kind of mental image this word creates.

And in our text it refers to all of God's creation apart from mankind itself. We know this because the sons of Adam are not looking forward to such a revelation. It will be their worst day. And sons of God are the ones who are going to be revealed.

So all of nature is waiting for this day. All of nature is anxious to be released from this curse too.

God has shaped all of history around what happens to His people. It is easy to see that the environmentalists have it completely backwards. Many of them would sacrifice humans for the good of nature. But they are fools. They have never consulted with the creator to find out what is truly important to Him. He states here in Romans that the history of our world is centered around the history of His children. When the time is right to end time as we know it, and for Christ to return for judgment, time for so-called mother earth is up. And when that time comes, it won't be man who destroys the earth, as the worldings are so concerned about. It will be the **creator** that will cleanse his creation which He cursed on the day that Adam ate of the forbidden fruit.

The only thing that is holding back this wonderful day, the only thing that is holding back the restoration of God's children and all of nature is a head count. God has a perfect count of all of his children. And it is not until every single one of them is safely in the fold that he will move to the next stage of his plan. If nature were a person, you could see what rapt attention it would have on the children of God. They are center stage in the plan of God. They are where God's heart is in world events.

And it is no wonder, with all the importance that God places on the welfare of His children, that we should love one another. Our ministry to each other is the most important thing we can do with our lives. When we love one another we are catering to the one thing that is central to God's heart. He so loves his children that everything else is subservient to that one love. May we adapt our lives to so love that which is central to God's heart.

And this week I hope we will take to heart Paul's reckoning. A speck or a bullion...which is worth more?