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Romans 8:18-25 “Victory Over Suffering”

Intro. In v.17 of my text last week, Paul made reference to us being children of God, joint heirs with Christ, and being glorified with Christ. Yet he also made reference to us suffering with Christ in this life. This could lead some to question how it can be that God allows His children to suffer. They suggest that suffering is inconsistent with our being children of God. Paul sees no inconsistency. Remember, Paul said that we may suffer “with Him,” that is, Christ. He was God’s Son, but that did not exclude Him from suffering. Furthermore, we still live in bodies & in a world that are still under the curse of sin that we read about in Genesis 3.

Now all of you need to know how to face suffering. Most of us do not even like to think about suffering, but it is a part of life. We enter the world through the suffering of our mothers, and we usually leave the world through suffering. Throughout life we face various kinds of suffering. We will suffer physically, especially as we get older. At times we face emotional pain. Haven’t you suffered the pain of rejection from time to time? Other times we will suffer from a sense of loss, whether the loss of loved ones through death or broken relationships, or the loss of financial security. Sometimes we will suffer by seeing others suffer. When our children get hurt, we hurt with them. I’m sure some of you are enduring suffering of some kind right now. But the type of suffering that Paul is mainly addressing, according to v.17 and vv.35-36, is suffering for Christ’s sake. 2 Tim. 3:12 says, “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” Paul is writing to Christians in Roman. They would face intense persecution shortly after Paul wrote this letter to them. Today, about 200 million Christians are suffering for their faith worldwide. I believe we are going to face more persecution right here in our country.

How well do you handle suffering? Do you do everything possible to avoid suffering, even if that means becoming reclusive, or denying Christ? Does suffering tend to make you bitter against God and others? Do you complain about your suffering to anyone who will listen? Do you fret & worry in the midst of suffering? Do you panic? Will suffering destroy your will to live and lead to your death? Well in another context about suffering, Paul says in v.37, “Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” He is talking about the fact that we can be more than conquerors over our sufferings through Christ who loved us. Isn’t that what you want?

Well I want you to listen to the words of a man who was an expert on suffering. Very few suffered as much as Paul did. He was stoned, beaten and whipped, imprisoned, and run out of town many times. He suffered hunger, shipwreck, & other trials (cf. 2 Cor. 11:23-28). Yet he was rarely defeated by his suffering. He remained faithful to Christ, and often responded with joy. How did he do it? Well let me share with you three ways we can overcome suffering:

I. BY MENTAL CALCULATION

You can be victorious over your sufferings by how you think and how you view your sufferings. Paul says in v.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.” The word “consider” (*logizomai*) refers to a mental calculation. How you think about your suffering, how you view it, makes all the

difference in the world. If you do not think right about your sufferings, you are going to be defeated by them.

Notice Paul's perspective here. Why is it "that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us"? One reason is given by Paul in another Scripture. In 2 Cor. 4:17 Paul refers to his affliction as "light." He suffered intensely, and yet he viewed it as "light affliction." Did you realize that the pain of suffering is affected by your attitude and emotional state? If you are down & depressed, you tend to magnify the pain. But if you respond with joy, hope, and a good attitude, your pain will be less. How did Paul have such a good & positive perspective on suffering? First of all, Paul kept in mind that:

A. Our Pain Is Small in Length – He says, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment...." When you suffer, you need to keep in mind the relative brevity of your suffering. In comparison to eternal glory, any suffering we endure in this life is indeed "but for a moment." Let's face it, most of the time our suffering is only temporary. The next time you have surgery, just keep in mind that your suffering will probably last only a few days. And even if you suffer the rest of your life, compared to eternity it is still only "for a moment."

J. Vernon McGee told of a black congregation in Memphis, TN where the pastor asked for some favorite verses of Scripture. One man got up and said his favorite verse was, "And it came to pass." He sat down, and everyone looked puzzled. The pastor asked him how in the world *that* could be his favorite passage. He answered, "When I get in trouble, I turn to where it says, 'it came to pass,' and I know my troubles came to pass. They didn't come to stay."¹

Here's something else to keep in mind:

B. Our Pain Is Minimal in Intensity Compared to the Intensity of the Glory We Shall Enjoy - Paul, writing against a background of recent and (even for him) unparalleled tribulation, had assured his friends in Corinth a year or two previously that "our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." He says something similar in v.18 of our text. Think of the most intense pain your have ever experienced. Well here Paul promises that our joy in heaven will be even more intense than any pain we have experienced in this life. So Paul overcame his suffering by taking his mind off his pain, and on the glory that is to come. When a child gets hurt, there is something about the promise of an ice cream cone that seems to make it better. Don't focus your attention upon your pain but upon the good things of God. For the believer, the best is yet to come!

C. Our Suffering Leads to an Even Greater Glory – Again, Paul says that "our light affliction... is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Especially when you suffer for Christ, you will be rewarded with even greater glory some day. Jesus said in Mt. 5:11-12, "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven...." Furthermore, when you respond to suffering in the right way, you will grow closer to the Lord. You will learn to depend upon Him more. Suffering builds character, & helps you grow as a Christian. The more you suffer now, the greater will be your capacity for glory in the life to come. The positive spiritual benefits of suffering will lead to greater reward some day.

¹ J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 5 (Pasadena: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983), 387.

So as you face suffering, remember that having the right perspective on suffering will go a long way toward overcoming it. Not only do we overcome suffering by having the right perspective, but also:

II. BY EXERCISING HOPE

You can endure suffering much better if you have hope of a better future. That is one reason why Paul makes at least 5 references to hope in this text of Scripture.² For example, Paul said in v.24, “For we were saved in this hope....” We are even commanded to hope in 1 Peter 1:13, which says, “...hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” A person who faces a serious illness with hope of recovery will fair much better than the person who just gives up hope. Those who had hope were much more likely to survive the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps.

I have good news for you. We Christians always have hope. Our hope that things are going to get better is based on the promises of God and the love of God. 1 Thessalonians 5:8 talks about “the hope of salvation.” Even if things do not get better in this life, we still have hope because of the life to come. We know that everything will be alright in heaven. Yet when unbelievers suffer, they have no hope. 1 Thess. 4:13 says, “But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.” In Ephesians 2:12 Paul said that before we became Christians, we were among those who had “no hope and without God in the world.” There is no hope in the hearts of unbelievers who live only for the here and now.

Now in this text of Scripture, Paul tells us what we are hoping for. First:

A. We Hope for the Restoration of Our World – Beginning in v.19 Paul personifies creation³ and even attributes hope to creation. Right now creation is suffering from the effects of the curse placed upon it soon after Adam & Eve sinned (see Gen. 3:17-18). That is why Paul says in v.20, “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope.” Man sinned deliberately and willingly; creation was his unwilling victim.

Paul describes the effects of the curse in several ways. Again, in v.20 Paul says, “For the creation was subjected to futility....” “Futility” (*mataiotes*) refers to what is fruitless or futile. It fails to fulfill its purpose. When God created this world it was good, but now it is flawed in many ways. Nature can’t be what it was made to be. Nature is frustrated. Often the fruit of creation is spoiled by insects, weeds, disease, & bad weather. Furthermore, in v.21 Paul refers to “the bondage of corruption.” This is the bondage which consists in corruption. Have you noticed that just about everything tends to decay? Our world cannot free itself from this condition. There is a law in science known as “The Law of Entropy,” which states that the order of an earthly system tends to become disorganized. The theory of evolution is not true because it is opposite of this law of physics. The universe is not in an upward trend; it’s in a downward trend. We are going from order to disorder & decay, not disorder to order.

As a result of this curse placed upon creation, we read in v.22, “For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.” There are three things that we see groaning in verses 19-27: creation (v.22), believers (v.23), and the Holy Spirit (v.26). “What is

² I say at least because “earnest expectation” (v.19) and “eagerly waiting” (vv.23 & 25) are similar to hope.

³ This is not the first time the writers of Scripture personified creation. In Isaiah 55:12, we read, “...the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.”

everyone groaning about?” Basically, they are lamenting about what it is like to live in this world of pain and sin. Our world is still subjected to the curse of sin.

Actually, Paul pictures the world groaning from “birth pangs.” This is a fitting illustration that ties into the concept of hope. Even though the creation is groaning from the effect of the curse, in the end it will bring forth a joyful and blessed fruit. The pain of childbirth is one pain that women can look forward to because it brings a child into the world. Also, in childbirth, the pains become more frequent and more intense. Scientists tell us that earthquakes are becoming just like that. Someday, this earth will in a sense become born again. In Mt. 24:7-8 Jesus said that in the last days, “there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.” “Sorrows” (*odin*) there is “birth pains.” When the tribulation comes, the earth will go into hard labor, followed by deliverance from the curse, for even though God subjected creation to a curse, He did so “in hope” (v.20) that creation would one day be restored. Paul said in v.21, “because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.” Praise God, a new day is coming! One day creation will be delivered, and the groaning creation will become a glorious creation! The curse of sin will be removed. The creation will be set free from the consequences of sin. Everything will be the way God wants it to be. There will be no sin, evil, pain, sorrow, death or tears. So we see that the true hope of creation is not Al Gore, the Sierra Club, or the U.N., but God!

Notice also that the salvation of the earth is tied to the ultimate & final salvation of believers. Paul says in v.19, “For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God.” Likewise in v.21 he says, “because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.” Nothing is more familiar to the readers of the Old Testament than the idea that the whole world is to be clothed in new beauty when the Messiah appears. All of this will take place in association with the Second Coming of Christ. So we see that nature’s destiny is inseparably linked to the destiny of man. Because man sinned, creation fell. When man is restored to the glorious state that God has planned for His children, creation will be restored.

So we have seen that there is hope for creation. Now let us also see that:

B. We Have Hope for the Completion of Our Salvation - The salvation we now possess is in one sense incomplete, for as Paul goes on to say in v.24, hope is no longer exercised when the thing hoped for is realized. We are not waiting for the salvation of our souls. That has already been completed. However, we are still eagerly waiting for the completion of other aspects of our salvation. So what is our hope? One thing we hope for is:

1. Our Revelation as Sons of God – In the last of v.19 Paul makes reference to “the revealing of the sons of God.” This refers to the time when we shall be manifested in our true character and glory as sons of God. Colossians 3:4 says, “When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.” 1 John 3:2 says, “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” Though the world does not recognize us as sons of God, some day it will!

2. The Redemption of Our Body – Paul mentions this in the last of v.23. Our bodies are still under the curse of sin. Our bodies grow older; they need medical attention more often. We often groan from suffering. Then the time comes when in weakness our bodies die. Our bodies will decay. We often ask, “Lord, did you create us to be like this?” Of course the answer is no! Praise God, we will receive new resurrection bodies which are not subject to pain, decay, and death. Paul

refers to this as the completion of our adoption. This is the thrilling climax to the adoption that took place at conversion when “the Spirit of adoption” gave us an adult standing in God’s family. When Christ returns, what we read in Rev. 21:4 will come to pass, “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” They day is coming when we will be free from all that. That is why Paul mentions in the last of v.21 “the glorious liberty of the children of God.” We will become totally set free from all suffering and sin. No more bondage of any kind. Aren’t you looking forward to that?

3. Our Glorification - Back in v.17 he says we will be glorified with Christ. Then in the last of v.18 he refers to “the glory which shall be revealed in us.” Our glorification is also mentioned in v.30. We will not just be spectators of the glory of God. We shall share His triumph & glory when He comes again. Notice that this glory is to be revealed “unto [*eis*] us”, i.e. it is to reach unto us, is to be bestowed upon us, so that we become the actual partakers; it is not a glory of which we are to be mere spectators. We will appear in glory with Him.

Our hope should include an element of “earnest expectation,” as Paul mentions in v.19. The words “earnest expectation” comes from a Greek word that means to watch with the head erect and outstretched.⁴ It is an expectation that waits the time out, that never fails until the object is attained. When you go through suffering, is that your attitude? Are you eagerly looking for the fulfillment of our hope?

Think of a couple who have fallen in love with each other. We will say, for example, that it is autumn, and they know they cannot be married until the end of a school year. It is not long before the young man says, “Darling, think! we will be married in just two hundred and fifty days!” And they will delight to count off the days, to find themselves in the two hundred and thirties, then in the two hundred and twenties. The day when their marriage is one hundred and ninety-nine days away is a landmark. Then the number goes down slowly-oh, so slowly!-toward the one hundred day mark. Then it is ninety days, sixty days, thirty days, ten days, tomorrow! All true lovers know this loving groaning toward their day of hope, the consummation of their joy. This was the purpose of their falling in love, that they might be together, that they might be one [Barnhouse, pp. 138-139].

Argumentation: Is this hope that we have just pie-in-the-sky wishful thinking? Is there any assurance that this hope will be realized some day? Well let me share what Paul says which hints at the assurance we have that what we hope for will come to pass. Note the phrase in v.23, “the first fruits of the Spirit.” It is an agricultural term denoting the first fruits of the harvest, thought of as a pledge of the full crop to come. [“Of the Spirit” is a genitive of identity]. We have received the first installment of what heaven will be like by the presence & work of the Holy Spirit. He displays God’s power through us, and shows us God’s grace and goodness, He gives us a taste of glory. When I see the Holy Spirit give me victory over sin, I get a taste of what it will be like when I have complete victory over sin in eternity. When the Holy Spirit allows me to praise God, I get a sense of what it will be like to praise Him perfectly in eternity. The Spirit gives us love, joy, & peace as a foretaste of what heaven will be like. But the main point that I want to make is the fact that the Holy Spirit in us is the assurance that all the rest of the promises of God are sure to be fulfilled.

When you suffer, do you focus your attention on the marvelous hope you have in Christ, or do you focus on your suffering? You will be far better off to focus on your hope, and you will just about forget about your suffering.

⁴ From *apokaradokia*, from *apo* away, *kara* the head, *dokein* to watch.

So we need to overcome suffering by correct thinking and by exercising hope. Finally, this text shows us another way we can be victorious over suffering:

III. BY PATIENT ENDURANCE

Paul says in v.25, “But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.” There is a close link here and elsewhere between hope and being able to patiently endure suffering. Perseverance is to continue under heavy trial without quitting or giving up. The link between hope & patient endurance is also found in 1 Thess. 1:3, where Paul expresses gratitude for their “patience of hope.” The believer does not get frustrated as he sees and experiences suffering and pain in this world. We are to patiently endure our suffering. There are so many people who face suffering just want to take the easy way out and quit. They may commit suicide. But the child of God should face suffering with perseverance. We must not give up or quit. We keep going, trusting in the strength that God provides. We need to be like a football running back. You score a touchdown only after getting knocked down many, many times.

As you face suffering, I want to encourage you to make it your goal to persevere through it, trusting in God to provide the strength you need. Don’t quit. Be faithful to the end!

Jesus is the greatest example of perseverance in the face of suffering. He endured the suffering of Gethsemane. He endured the suffering of being arrested, mocked, false accused, imprisoned, and rejected by His own people. He endured the suffering of being mocked & beaten by the Roman guard. He endured lash after last of the Roman whip called the cat of 9 tails. Endured the suffering of the cross. Through it all He never quit, but persevered, that He may accomplish our salvation.

Conclusion: So if you are going through suffering right now, how will you respond in light of God’s Word? I challenge you to exercise the right perspective. Don’t focus on your suffering. Don’t magnify it. Instead, minimize it by focusing on your Christian hope. Don’t quit. Don’t give up. Persevere to the end, knowing that your suffering is working in you a far greater weight of glory!

If you are not yet a Christian, what hope do you have for the future? You have no hope. Why not put your faith in Jesus Christ, & He will give you hope. He will give you a better perspective on suffering. He will help you patiently endure whatever suffering you face in life.

Sources: Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, vol. 3, “God’s Heirs” (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); Bruce Corley & Curtis Vaughan, *Romans: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950 reprint); John MacArthur, Jr., *Security in the Spirit: Study Notes on Romans 8* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1985); Leon McBeth, *Exegetical & Practical Commentary on Romans* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1937); John Murray, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible [CD-ROM]* (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Right: Romans* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1977); Kenneth S. Wuest’s *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Romans (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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