

Not Worth Comparing

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[0:00] I'd like you to get out your Bibles if you have your Bible with you.

If you don't, there are plenty of Bibles scattered around in the chairs. You can grab one of those and open up to the book of Romans, chapter 8. Romans, chapter 8. We are right in the middle of chapter 8 of Romans.

Romans, we're going to begin this morning in verse 18 and we'll read down through verse 25. If you're using one of the Bibles that we have in the chairs, you just need to turn to page 944.

I've been saying page 944 for a while because we've been on this page and in this chapter for a while. So page 944 or Romans, chapter 8 in your own copy of the Scriptures.

You guys, would you please stand in honor of God's Word as we read together? Romans, chapter 8, verses 18 through 25. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

[1:07] For the creation waits with eager longing 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 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the Spirit groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

For in this hope we are saved. For in this hope we are saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Help us to wait with patience, we ask this morning, Father. But help us as we wait to see as much as your word reveals of the glories that are to come for those who belong to you.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. You guys take a seat. I noticed this week as I was on the internet, I noticed that there is a movie version.

[2:29] And some of you may have known this for a while, I just didn't realize it. A movie version, a full theatrical release of the book, 90 Minutes in Heaven, which of course is an account written by Don Piper, not John Piper, very different people, but a fellow named Don Piper about his experiences after he was in an accident.

And he claims to have spent 90 minutes, an hour and a half in heaven as he was clinically dead or something along those lines. And we are reminded that there is sort of a spate of books that came out and have come out in the last 15 to 20 years that purport to be about various people's experiences when they were, at least according to them, they were medically or clinically considered to be dead.

And it's their accounts of their various experiences and the things that they saw, the things that they experienced in that time. And all of them seem to be somewhat similar in their accounts.

There have been a number of these that have been written. In fact, there was a satire of them put out, a satire news report put out of them sometime back in which this particular newspaper that's not a real newspaper, it's just a satirical paper, claimed to be an interview with someone who was writing, also putting out a particular book.

And they said that in their vision of heaven that they were also told that they would receive a lucrative book deal when they came back to life. And that indeed turned out to be the case. And that seems to be the case. These folks having experiences writing books, selling millions of copies of the books.

[4:04] And every time that happens there being some conferences here and there and Christians getting all excited and buying the books and reading them. And I've always found that to be a bit odd for a couple of reasons.

For one, we know of an account in the scriptures where someone was indeed given a vision of heavenly glory. The Apostle Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians that he in fact was taken up into what he calls the third heaven and he saw things.

But Paul says that he was not able or he was not allowed to report all the things that he saw. So that whereas the great Apostle Paul, through whom the Spirit inspired much of the New Testament, was not allowed to report the things that he saw in heaven, yet we have all these folks today who are reporting the things that they supposedly saw when they made these supposed journeys to heaven.

But aside from that, we find in passages like our one that we're looking at this morning that we are encouraged in the scriptures not to base our hope on the things that we have seen, nor to base our hope on some contemporary person who claims to have seen things, but we are to base our hope on the things that we have not seen and that in fact we cannot see right now.

In fact, take a look down at the last verse in our passage, the last two verses, verses 24 and 25.

Paul has been speaking about this great glory that awaits those who belong to Christ.

[5:34] And he says in verse 24, For in this hope we were saved. Now, hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?

But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. So Paul says real hope is hope in what we do not see. It's hope in things that we cannot directly experience right now in this moment.

Many of you might recall the story of Thomas, one of Jesus' disciples. After the resurrection, when Jesus had appeared to a number of the other disciples, Thomas, having not seen Jesus, says, I'm not going to believe all of these reports unless I actually am able to touch the scars.

I want to see his side. I want to see his hands. And Jesus later in the gospel accounts, in his grace and mercy in the gospel of John, we are told that Jesus came and indeed appeared to Thomas, allowed him to see and even touch the scars that he had.

But Jesus had something to say in that moment because he said, You believe because you've seen. But Jesus says, Blessed are those who will believe even though they have not seen.

[6:42] because Jesus was well aware that outside of the days in which he appeared to his disciples, there would be generation after generation, now we know century after century, of believers, of followers of Christ, who would never have the opportunity in this life to actually see Christ physically risen from the dead, to actually touch his hands where the scars were, or his feet or his side where the scars were.

And so Jesus says, Thomas, you've seen and believed. That's fine. But those who do not see, the vast majority of those who will trust in Christ, those who do not see me, they are blessed beyond the blessing that you received right now in this moment in seeing me.

So often we convince ourselves that if we could just see, if we could just touch, if we could have been there in the first century, then we would have greater faith. But Paul says here in Romans chapter 8 that hope, which is akin to faith and related to faith, hope that is based on what we see is not really hope.

It is a deficient faith that depends upon the things that we can see and touch and know in the here and now that trusts. But a more complete hope, a richer hope, a deeper hope is a hope in what we do not see.

So that when Paul describes for us in these verses, the things that await us, he expects us to base our hopes upon those things, not because we see them now, but because we are promised them in God's Word.

[8:17] Not because we can reach and touch the things that await us, but because we can trust in the testimony of God's Word to those things. And so this morning, as we look at these verses, I want us to look and I want us to meditate upon the glories that await us in the future.

We're actually going to spend two weeks on this passage. This morning, meditation upon the future glory that awaits us. Next week, we will turn and consider what Paul has to say about the transformation of all of creation that will accompany the day when we experience this glory.

But this morning, I just want us to focus upon that future glory. Because I believe that faith in that future glory can become a fuel for how we live our lives now.

It can become motivation for the decisions that we make now in the moment. Look back up at verse 18 where Paul begins. He says, I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

So there are two ways that we can think about the glory that is to be revealed to us. We can look in verses 19 down through verse 23. We can look specifically at the handful of things, the couple of things that Paul tells us directly about the future glory that awaits us.

[9:44] Or we consider the sufferings that Paul says, in light of the glory that awaits us, are not even worth a comparison. We can consider the greatness of the suffering that we endure now in this life and look at the freedom that we're going to experience from those sufferings in the future.

And even by that, we can gain sort of a bit of a better understanding of what awaits us. So let's do that this morning. I want us first to consider the sufferings that we experience in this age that cannot compare with the glory to be revealed.

And then I want us to look at a couple of things that Paul actually says directly about the future glory that awaits us. Now, when Paul says something like, the sufferings of this age are not worth comparing with what's coming, we need to keep two things in mind.

First of all, when Paul says this age or this time, I think in this instance, he has in mind the entire period of human history from the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden to the return of Christ.

Now, many times in the New Testament when you have a reference to this age or the new age or the present age or something along those lines, many times that's a reference to the time between the two comings of Christ, the time between Christ's resurrection and ascension into heaven and when he will return.

[11:05] But in this instance, I think Paul does have a broader time period, that time of all of human history after the fall until the coming of Christ. And I say that because of what Paul says throughout the rest of these verses.

Paul references the fall when he talks in verse 20 about the creation being subjected to futility. That's a reference to what happened in the garden in Genesis chapter 3 when God cursed the ground and the earth.

We'll talk about what exactly that was and what that entailed next week. But we need to notice here, though, that Paul is thinking on a large scale here.

He's thinking of the entire scope of human history and all of the suffering that has ever come to any human being since the fall of Adam and Eve. All suffering of all of human history combined and put together, Paul says, is not worthy of being compared to the glory that awaits us.

So I want us to think about the breadth of the suffering that Paul has in mind, but I also want us to keep in mind the depth of the kind of suffering that Paul has in mind. Because I think for those of you who have experienced real deep suffering, suffering, this can be a little bit difficult to believe.

[12:23] Or for those of you who have seen real pain in the world around you, you may think, I'm not sure that Paul is really considering the amount and the depth of suffering that exists in the world.

We're tempted to think that way sometimes. But I want to remind you that Paul himself was one who endured great suffering in his life. In fact, I want you to hold your place in Romans chapter 8, and I want you to turn over just a couple of books past Romans to 2 Corinthians.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 11, Paul lists a handful of the sufferings that he experienced in his own life so that we can understand and know that he gets it.

He gets that there is deep suffering in the world. 2 Corinthians chapter 11, verse 24, Paul says, five times, so five different times, on five occasions, this happened to Paul.

Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes, less one. That's 39 whips. Some of you have seen the movie The Passion of the Christ that came out years ago where there's graphic imagery of Jesus experiencing something similar to this.

[13:39] Paul says, five, on five different occasions, I received those kinds of lashings. In intense physical pain that Paul suffered for his faith.

He says in verse 25, three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Imagine that.

Not many people survived being stoned. It was people picking up rocks and throwing them at you, large rocks, small rocks, pummeling you until you were a bloody heap and you were usually dead.

And yet somehow, Paul survived his stoning. Five times being lashes, three times beaten with rods, once he was stoned. All of that, various forms of persecution that Paul experienced. Moving beyond persecution, three times I was shipwrecked. Three times the Apostle Paul experienced shipwreck.

[14 : 36] In one of those occasions, it says, a night and a day I was adrift at sea. Many people do not survive a night and a day adrift at sea. Verse 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 in toil and hardship through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst and without food, in cold and exposure.

You see, you have to remember the Apostle Paul's lifestyle. He was a traveling missionary. He went from city to city. There were no vehicles to be taken. You had to walk or go by boat, hence the shipwrecks.

Hence the time spent in the wilderness because there's wilderness between the cities where he was in great danger from all sorts of things. Hence the times that he was in various cities being persecuted in cities and the dangers he faced in cities, but not merely persecution.

He mentions robbers. There were times when Paul would have faced the threat of being beaten and robbed as he was traveling down the road. There were so many things that Paul experienced in his years of missionary effort so that he understands, he is acquainted with the depth of human suffering.

He knows the sorts of things that can happen. He would later on, in fact, be beheaded and lose his life in a violent fashion after spending a number of years and months in prison.

[16 : 11] Paul understands suffering so that when he says that he considers the sufferings of this age not worth comparing, he gets it. He knows the depth of suffering. He knows not only his own suffering, he has seen fellow believers also persecuted for their faith.

He has seen some lose their lives. he is well aware of the amount of suffering that people can encounter in this world. He's aware of the ravages of sickness.

He speaks of one of his co-workers and how he was relieved when one of his co-workers finally was no longer with him by his side because that co-worker had been so ill for so long that Paul was afraid that he would lose him.

So he understood the grief of having someone that he loved to be deadly and deathly ill when there was nothing that he could do to solve the problem. Paul understood all sorts of suffering because in this world there is great suffering.

You may have experienced some great suffering yourself. You may have battled some terrible disease. You may have lost a loved one. You may have experienced great pain within your family or among relationships that you have with people.

[17 : 22] But believe me, there is great suffering in the world. Probably some of us here have only experienced just a sliver, just a slight amount of the suffering compared to what other people experience in the world.

There are terrible things happening to our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world even right now as we meet. There will be Christians killed in other parts of the world now this morning because of their faith.

There will be those who will be beaten. There will be terrible things done. Terrible things, unspeakable things done. to others now occurring probably in the moment around the world.

So there is great suffering in the world. No matter our personal acquaintance with it, there is great suffering in the world. Paul was aware of it and Paul even experienced much of it and yet Paul says it is not worth comparing with what is coming.

Now I just want you to consider two categories of suffering this morning before we turn to look at the glory that will counter these two categories. On the one hand we do as I've mentioned most of the things that I've mentioned most of the things that Paul lists most of the things that we think of when we think of suffering are physical suffering.

[18 : 37] It might be an illness of some sort. It might be being persecuted physically at the hands of people. It could be any sort of thing but things that we tend to experience in this life that cause us physical pain and cause us physical harm and what we know is that that kind of suffering will not compare with our freedom from it in the future.

Whether it's a beating at the hands of the persecutors whether it's a terrible illness that you get whatever it might be it will not compare. But there are other kinds of suffering that we perhaps don't think about very often.

There is the suffering of living in a fallen world in which we are constantly beset by temptation and drawn into sin. Because lest we forget just a few verses earlier in this chapter Paul has called us to wage war against sin.

He has called us to engage in a battle in which we put to death the deeds of the body. Take a look back up in verse 12 verse 13. He says if you live according to the flesh you'll die but if by the spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live.

Just the fight in this fallen world with your fallen nature against the temptation that you face. That alone is a form of suffering that no one is free from.

[19 : 56] So there is in addition to the physical suffering that we face there is great spiritual suffering and chief among the spiritual suffering that we all endure is temptations that beset us on a daily even hourly basis.

Suffering knows all sorts of forms physical forms spiritual forms we are caused to doubt our faith doubt the reality of the gospel doubt the person of Jesus there are so many spiritual sufferings that we will face in addition to the physical suffering that many of us have to deal with.

So many things and yet Paul is able to say in the face of all of that it does not compare to the glory that is to be revealed.

My translation says to us. Some of your translations might say to the glory that is to be revealed in us or for us because the word that's used here is a word that has a broad range of meaning and I think Paul uses it intentionally because the glory that he's speaking of is a glory that not only will we see which is implied in the word to a glory to be revealed to us it's not just a glory that we will see it's a glory in which we will participate it's a glory in which we will have a share.

So take a look down in verse 21 where we're told that the creation itself will someday be set free from its bondage to corruption to obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

[21 : 28] So this is a glory that belongs to the children of God not just a glory that we will see but a glory that will be ours that we will participate in which is I think what Paul means when he refers in verse 30 to us someday being glorified.

It is a glory not merely to be seen not merely to be a spectator of but is a glory in which we will be enfolded and enraptured. It's a great glory and our participation in it is fundamental to our understanding what awaits us.

So to counter the spiritual aspects of suffering that we face and the physical aspects of suffering that we face we can see in the text here we can see spiritual freedom and we can see a freedom from all the physical ailments that we have to deal with.

Verse 21 again someday we will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. He goes on to say that though the whole creation is groaning verse 23 not only the creation but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the spirit we groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons. We groan inwardly we are awaiting we have the first fruits of the spirit. What are the first fruits of the spirit? What are they? They're all the things that we've looked at over the last several weeks the works of the spirit that he does in our lives.

[22 : 59] The things that he is doing he begins by causing us to be born again and giving us new life and then he enables us to fight this battle against sin. He begins the work of transforming us and sanctifying us and then he does the work of helping us to sense and feel that we are really children of God now through faith in Jesus.

Those are just the first fruits. That's just the beginning of it. There will be such a greater testimony to the reality of our relationship with God the Father through Christ.

Yes we have been past tense if we've trusted in Christ adopted into God's family and yes we are presently more and more experiencing in a real way the reality of what it means to be children of God but there still awaits us the full realization of our adoption in Christ.

That's still future for us. We wait eagerly for our adoption as sons which means that all of the spiritual aspects of our suffering that we deal with in this world will be turned upon their head will be wiped away will be erased as we fully experience the work of the Spirit.

The life that he has infused into us now so that we might trust in Christ will be life that we experience to the full. The battle that we fight against sin and temptation now will be over with will be done away with because he will have defeated fully and finally all those latent sinful tendencies

within us they will be gone.

[24:32] How do we know that? Because we know the goal of all of this in verse 29 is that we might be conformed to the image of his son and there will be a day when that process comes to a kind of completion there's a sense in which it goes on forever but there will be a kind of completion that we experience on this day in which we are set free from the ravages of sin and temptation and we experience the life that we have the spirit has infused into us we experience it in a whole new way on a new level in its fullness and in its completeness and on that day we will rejoice fully and understand more fully what it means to be children of God.

So there will be release from all the spiritual suffering that we face and there will be glory spiritual glory that awaits us that will cause all of that spiritual suffering to seem like a vague distant memory as if it barely even existed.

But more than that the physical things that we deal with that we face in this life will also be dealt the death blow. Notice also over the end of verse 23 in addition to our adoption as sons he ties to our full adoption not just spiritual benefits but physical benefits the redemption of our bodies.

Which reminds us that in Romans chapter 8 verse 11 we were told that if the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you so if he's presently in you at work in you now then he will also give life to your mortal bodies through his spirit who dwells in you.

This is that moment. This is the life that he gives to our dead and dying bodies that we will receive on that day. And as we read earlier from the book of Revelation there will be no more death.

[26:31] There's no more tears. There's no more pain and sickness. It will not exist anymore. Whatever physical trials we face in this world maybe you've got a bad back or bad hip maybe you've got failing eyesight maybe your hearing is going out maybe you're just getting old and things tend to creak and they just don't move the way that they ought to.

Maybe that's just the case. Whatever it is whatever ailments you deal with now or you will deal with in the future there's coming a time when our bodies will be fully redeemed and we won't have to deal with any of that anymore.

It will be over with. And what's what's more astounding is that the redemption bodies that we receive on that day we are told in 1 Corinthians that those redemption bodies will be after the pattern of Christ.

There we see the same kind of first fruits imagery that he employs here but there it's different.

There Christ is the first fruits and all those who are in Christ like the first part of the crop participate in the kind of resurrection that Jesus received.

so that when we see the glorious body of Jesus at the end of the Gospels mentioned in the book of Revelation we have the hope of knowing that we will share in that that kind of resurrection someday.

[28:01] You know the Bible actually does not tell us very much about what our physical resurrected bodies will look like. Just as the Bible really doesn't tell us a whole lot about what the new heavens and new earth will look like or most people just use the word heaven to refer to that it's not the most accurate way to talk about our ultimate destination is new heavens and new earth renewed and recreated.

The Bible doesn't give us a lot of details on those sorts of things. As we said earlier Paul had a vision Paul saw but he wasn't allowed to talk about the things that he saw. John has a vision but the only descriptions that John gives of his vision some of which are heavenly realities are highly highly symbolic imagery.

he doesn't give any literal descriptions of what he sees. We're not to take the descriptions of the streets of gold we're not to take the descriptions if you take his description of the new Jerusalem literally then it's just a cube.

Well that's not to be taken literally. We're not given any just clearly painted pictures of our future physical resurrected bodies or of the world in which we will live partly I think because we could not comprehend those realities.

we just couldn't understand them we don't have the mental categories with which to think about those kinds of things.

[29:22] We just can't do it. And there are things awaiting us better bodies resurrected renewed free from the ravages of this fallen world bodies a world that will be renewed that we'll talk about next week a world renewed and set free from its own bondage to corruption things that we cannot possibly fully comprehend now.

We simply cannot. And yet those things Paul says those things await us. And though we cannot see them now though we cannot even if we were given a picture could not fully comprehend the picture though that is the case Paul urges us now to wait for it with patience.

Just he says hope for what we do not see we wait for it with patience. That's what we're encouraged to do. To wait in the midst of your temptations with patience for a day when you won't face temptation anymore.

To wait in the midst of your sickness for the day when you will not deal with sickness anymore. To wait when you're losing people that you love for the day when you will no longer lose those that you love. To wait with patience for that day.

But of course there's nothing to anticipate. There's nothing that you can wait for. There's nothing for you to look forward to if you have not first experienced the initial work of God's Spirit in making us sons of God.

[31:02] There's nothing to wait for. There's nothing for you to hope in. There's nothing for you to look forward to beyond this world. If you have not first trusted in he who has already been raised, you can have no hope of future resurrection if you are not united to the one who's already been raised.

And so I encourage you, if this hope that Paul talks about here feels distant to you or disconnected from your life or disconnected from your thinking, then that may very well be because it's not your hope, but it can be.

Through faith in Jesus, through faith in him who makes all of this possible and who has accomplished all of this for you, through faith in him and what he's done on the cross, this hope can be yours.

Let's pray. Let's pray.