

Incomparable Glory (Romans 8:18)

Introduction: Please open your Bible to Romans 8:18.

One of the more well-known false teachers of our time is **Jesse Duplantis**. He is a health, wealth, and prosperity preacher from south Louisiana. Many years ago he claimed to have gone to heaven. And while in heaven he claims that he met the Apostle Paul. And in the course of their conversation Jesse Duplantis claims that Paul gave him **the secret to avoid suffering**. What an outrageous claim.

Suffering is one of the most terrible words in the English language. All of us are naturally averse to suffering because it is painful and we don't like pain. If we had the power to write the story of our lives we would omit suffering. If there was a secret to avoid suffering we would do everything in our power to get it. If we put a banner in front of our church building advertising a new sermon series on: *The Secret To Avoid Suffering*, this room would be filled to overflowing.

But contrary to Jesse Duplantis, there is no secret to avoid suffering. The idea that someone can live in this world and avoid suffering is a fantasy. It is a lie.

When the Apostle Paul was converted, God made this very sobering statement about him in... **Acts 9:16**, "For I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake." Apparently God Himself was not aware of the secret to avoid suffering.

You will remember that Jesus said in **Matthew 6:34**, "Each day has enough trouble of its own." Jesus also said in **Matthew 16:33**, "In this world you will have trouble."

It was Job who said...

Job 5:7, "For man is born for trouble, as sparks fly upward."

Thomas Boston, "Sin has turned the world from a paradise into a thicket; there is no getting through without being scratched."

Charles Spurgeon, "None of those who are in heaven came there riding upon beds of ease, but 'They wrestled hard, as we do now, with sins and doubts, and fears.' Do you expect to be carried into heaven on a golden couch? You will be mightily mistaken. Did Jesus die on a cross, and are you to be crowned with roses? 'Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease; While others fought to win the prize, And sail'd through bloody seas?'"

And so beloved, suffering in this life is **inescapable**. There is no avoiding it, even for a child of God. Life is filled with trials. It is one trial after another after another. It has been said that you are either in a trial, just leaving a trial, or about to enter a trial. And oftentimes we experience multiple trials at once. And sometimes particular trials last for long periods of time, perhaps years, perhaps even for the rest of your life.

Philosophers, scholars, theologians, and religious leaders of every kind have written scores of books on the subject of suffering. But under God there no better teacher on suffering than the

Apostle Paul. In his NT letters he has much to say to us about suffering. And one of the greatest passages that Paul wrote on suffering is before us this morning in **Romans 8**.

In **Romans 8** Paul does not tell us the secret to avoid suffering. Nor does he tell us that the goal of life is to avoid suffering. Instead, he teaches us **how to think** about suffering and **how to live** in the midst of suffering. What Paul teaches about suffering in **Romans 8** will keep you sane.

I remind you that **Romans 8** is all about the security of our justification.

I. The Gospel Introduced (1:1-17).

II. The Gospel Explained (1:18-4:25).

III. The Gospel Experienced (5:1-8:39).

A. The Benefits of Justification (5:1-11).

B. The Foundation of Justification (5:12-21).

C. The Holiness of Justification (6:1-7:25).

D. The Security of Justification (8:1-39).

So far we have learned that we are secure in Christ for three reasons the first of which is our...

1. Deliverance from condemnation (8:1-4).

God will never condemn us for our sins because He condemned Jesus in our place.

We are also secure in Christ because of our...

2. Empowerment over the flesh (8:5-13).

By the power of the Spirit we have been delivered from the power of the flesh. We are no longer flesh people who live under the controlling influence of the flesh. We are now Spirit people who live under the controlling influence of the Spirit. We are in the Spirit and the Spirit is in us forever.

Over the last two weeks we have learned that we are also secure in Christ because of the...

3. Privileges of adoption (8:14-17).

By God's amazing grace, He has adopted us into His family through faith in Christ. We are no longer the children of the devil. We are now the children of God with all the rights and privileges therein. We are now and forever secure in God's Fatherly love and care.

That brings us now to the fourth section of this chapter which we are calling the...

4. Hope of glory (8:18-30).

This is an extraordinary passage of Scripture. It is so high and so lofty. It is about **our assurance of future glory**.

I want you to observe how this passage is **bracketed** with references to future glory. The passage begins in **v. 18** with future glory: "the glory that is to be revealed to us." The passage ends in **v. 30** with future glory. And so **vv. 18-30** are bracketed with the theme of future glory.

And in between Paul uses the word "hope" **6x (vv. 20, 24, 25)**. What is this hope of which Paul speaks? It is our hope of future glory.

With that said, I remind you that **Romans 5-8** is the third major section in the body of **Romans**.

And the overarching theme of **chapters 5-8** is **assurance**.

We could outline the body of **Romans** in this way:

1:18-3:20 can be summarized with the word **condemnation**.

3:21-4:25 can be summarized with the word **justification**.

5:1-8:39 can be summarized with the word **assurance**.

Thomas Schreiner, "The theme that distinguishes Rom. 5-8 from 1-4 is hope."

As we saw a few moments ago, Paul uses the word "hope" **6x** in **Romans 8**. You may remember that Paul began **chapter 5** using the word "hope" **3x** (**5:2, 4, 5**).

As Christians we have hope. We are not hopeless. We are hopeful. But what is hope?

The reality of hope in the Bible **involves two things**:

1. First, it refers to **the future**. Hope is a future oriented word. When we think about hope we are thinking about something that will take place in the future.

2. Second, it involves **assurance**. Hope in the Bible is **not a wish for something that is uncertain**. This is how we use the word "hope" in our contemporary culture. For example, we might say "I hope we win the game tonight." That thought expresses a wish that is uncertain.

But hope in the Bible is not like that. Hope in the Bible is not a wish. It is not uncertain. It is **an expectation** that is sure and certain. Therefore, our hope of future glory is not a wish. It is not in any way uncertain. It is as sure as anything can possibly be. Our hope of future glory is a certainty because it is promised to us by God who cannot lie.

The reality of our future hope is like **strands of rope** that are beautifully and powerfully woven all throughout **chapters 5-8**. But they come to a climax here in **Romans 8:18-30**. Dear people, it is a gift for you and me to be right here right now in this extraordinary passage. Savor every moment of it.

But with all of that said, this passage is also about **suffering**. The word "suffer" is used in **v. 18**. In **v. 20** Paul says: "the creation was subjected to futility." That is the language of suffering.

Paul also talks about **groaning** (vv. 22, 23, 26). There are **three groanings** in this chapter: Creation groans (v. 22). Believers groan (v. 23). We groan our way to glory. And the Spirit groans (v. 24). This is the language of suffering.

Furthermore, Paul talks about "the pains of childbirth" in **v. 22** and "our weakness" in **v. 26**. This is the language of suffering which is woven all throughout this passage.

Also, in this section Paul continues to emphasize our adoption:

In **v. 19** he says: "the revealing of the sons of God."

In **v. 21** he says: "the glory of the children of God."

In **v. 23** he says: "waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body."

And so is this passage about hope? Or is it about suffering? Yes. It's about both.

In **summary**, this passage is about **the assurance God's children have of future glory in the midst of suffering**.

This passage is so rich and profound and dense with theological truth that it can be intimidating. It's like coming to a large mountain and not knowing exactly how to climb it. In an effort to help us to know how to climb the mountain that is **Romans 8:18-30** this passage can be summarized under **two main headings**:

- a. The Christian perspective on suffering (v. 18).
- b. The Christian hope in suffering (vv. 19-30).

With the time that we have this morning we will look at the first main heading...

a. The Christian perspective on suffering (v. 18).

How are we to think about suffering? What is the Christian way of thinking about suffering? Paul tells us in **v. 18**.

There are **three key words** that I want you to see in **v. 18**:

The first word is: "sufferings."

The second word is: "glory."

And the third word is in between "sufferings" and "glory": the word "compared."

Paul makes a bold and daring claim in **v. 18**: "For I consider that the *sufferings* of this present time are not worthy to be *compared* with the *glory* that is to be revealed to us."

I know you may be tired of hearing me say this, but once again grammar matters. Prepositions matter. Paul begins **v. 18** with the preposition "for." As we have said many times, this word **introduces an explanation** of what was previously said. And so **v. 18** explains **v. 17**.

In **v. 17** Paul **concludes** the section on our adoption. But as Paul concludes his discussion of adoption he **introduces** the next section on suffering. And so **v. 17** is a **hinge verse**. It concludes one section while introducing another.

According to **v. 17** there is a vital connection between our adoption and our suffering. The way we prove our adoption as God's children is by our willingness to suffer for Christ. Adoption and suffering are **a package deal**. You cannot have adoption without suffering. As the children of God we are heirs of God who are promised a future inheritance. And as fellow heirs with Christ we will receive the same inheritance that Christ will receive.

But the pathway to our future inheritance is present suffering. This is the proper order. We do not receive our inheritance now. What we receive now is suffering. There is suffering now and then glory to follow. This was true for Jesus. It is true for all God's children. And so if you want future glory and a future inheritance, you must first suffer.

But that raises a question: Is suffering worth it? Is suffering for Christ worth it? Is future glory worth suffering for? This is the question that Paul answers in **v. 18**. And he answers it with a

resounding “Yes!!!!”

Paul answers this question in **v. 18** very personally...

“For I consider”

Let’s consider the word “consider.” From this Greek word we get our English word “logic.” It’s a word that has to do with thinking, reasoning, calculating, and drawing conclusions.

Please notice what Paul doesn’t say. He doesn’t say: “For I feel.” When we experience trials, normally our first response is an emotional one. When we suffer our default is to feel, to feel negative emotion. To feel anger. To feel sadness. To feel disappointment. To feel confused.

Now, I am not suggesting that it is necessarily wrong to feel something when you suffer. You can’t escape emotions when you suffer. Our aim is not to be stoic. But we must be very, very careful that we are not carried away and controlled by our negative emotions when we suffer. One way to avoid this pitfall is **to learn to think rightly about your suffering**.

This is what Paul does in **v. 18**. In this verse we have Paul’s perspective on suffering. This is how he thought about suffering. And since Paul is our example in how we are to live the Christian life, his perspective on suffering ought to be our perspective on suffering.

Paul goes on to say...

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time”

There are two things that I want you to see in the opening phrase of **v. 18**. First of all the word “suffering” is **plural**. There is **not just one kind of suffering** that we experience. There is a **multiplicity** of suffering that we experience. There are **numerous ways** that we suffer. There is **physical** suffering. There is **mental** suffering. There is **emotional** suffering. There is **spiritual** suffering. And under each one of these categories there are many, many kinds of suffering. There are numerous ways that we suffer physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

As the children of God, we are not immune from suffering. We experience all of these kinds of suffering. In fact, as the children of God, not only do we not suffer less than unbelievers, we suffer more. We suffer more because we are in a battle with sin and because we follow Christ who is hated by the world.

Having said that, let me clarify something. The Christian life is **a life of peace and joy in God**. There is a peace and a joy that we have in God that the world doesn’t know. God is our Father. God is our refuge. With God there is always reasons to rejoice. But the Christian life is also a life of suffering.

As the children of God, we face **two broad kinds of suffering**: We suffer because we follow Christ. And we suffer because we live in a fallen world.

In terms of following Christ, the Christian life is **costly**. It is sacrificial. Obviously, compared to the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, any sacrifice that we make is small. But the Christian life is sacrificial, nonetheless. And sacrifices are not easy. As Christians we sacrifice our **comfort**. We

sacrifice our **time**. We sacrifice our **energy**. We sacrifice our **money**. We may sacrifice **friends and even family** who may oppose us. We may sacrifice our **job and opportunities** for earthly advancement. We may be mocked, scorned, rejected, and hated. We may be treated unjustly. We may experience physical abuse. We may even be killed. We suffer because we follow Christ.

In addition, we suffer because we live in a fallen world. There are many, many ways that we suffer in a fallen world. Paul mentions some of the ways we suffer here in **Roman 8 (vv. 35-36)**.

The second thing I want you to see in the opening phrase of **v. 18** is how Paul describes our sufferings as “of this present time.” Our sufferings are “the sufferings of this present time.” It literally reads: “the sufferings of the now time.”

Now is the time for suffering. This present age is the time for suffering. Ever since the fall of man in **Genesis 3**, the whole history of the world has been a history of suffering. You could study the entire history of the world by just studying the history of **war** or the history of **natural disasters**. In this present time, war, natural disasters, crime, conflict, sickness, and death are normal.

Everything we do in life involves suffering. There is suffering for young people and old people. There is suffering at home and outside the home. There is suffering in school and in the workplace. There is suffering at work and at play. There is suffering in your career and in your retirement. There is suffering in being single and in being married. There is suffering in having children and in not having children. There is much suffering as we live in “the now time.”

Even as we gather here today, everyone in this room is suffering something. These are “the sufferings of this present time.” And our sufferings can be so hard and painful. And at times it feels as if our suffering will never end.

Think with me now about **Paul’s life**. He didn’t write this letter from an **ivory tower**. He wrote this letter as a man who suffered immensely. In fact it may even be accurate to say that Paul suffered more than anyone else I know of other than Jesus.

And more than in any other letter, Paul records his suffering in **2 Corinthians**. **2 Corinthians** is Paul’s most personal letter. Paul wrote **2 Corinthians** because he was being attacked by false teachers who falsely accused him of many things including that he was a false apostle. In response to their evil and false accusations, Paul was forced to do something that he did not want to do: He was forced to defend himself. And one of the ways Paul defended himself was by describing his suffering.

How can you know that Paul is a genuine Apostle of Jesus Christ? Look at his suffering. If Paul was a false Apostle, he would not have suffered for Christ the way he did. In **2 Corinthians 11:22-29** Paul compares himself with the false teachers. Paul experienced tremendous pain.

Given all of Paul’s suffering, it is so powerful what he doesn’t say in **Romans 8:18**. He doesn’t say...

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not *worth it.*”

No! Instead he says...

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not *worthy*.” They “are not worthy to be *compared* with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

Paul puts these two realities side by side: **Present sufferings** and **future glory**. And he compares them with each other. He puts them both on a **scale**. On one side of the scale he puts all of our **present sufferings**. On the other side of the scale he puts our **future glory**. And when these two realities are placed side by side on a scale, they are **not equal**. They do not have **equal weight**. Eternal glory **far outweighs** present suffering.

ILLUSTRATION: Shelley has a t-shirt that says: “Take me to the beach.” She wore it recently when everything was iced over. So let’s take a trip to the beach. And let’s bring a scale with us. On one side of the scale place **one teaspoon of sand**. On the other side place **the entire beach**. On one side of the scale place **one teaspoon of water**. On the other side place **the entire ocean**. That’s what Paul is saying about present sufferings compared to future glory. There is **no comparison**. The difference between these two realities is so great they **can’t be compared**. They can only be **contrasted**.

Now, Paul is not saying that present sufferings are **easy**. They are not easy. They can be excruciatingly painful. They can bring you to your knees. They can make you weep. They can be devastating. They can leave scars on your life that never totally heal in this world.

But, when compared to eternal glory, they don’t compare. That is why I titled this message: *Incomparable Glory*. There are certain things that we can never fully understand such as the size of the universe. We know that the universe is huge. But none of us understand how huge it is. In the same way, we know that future glory is glorious. But none of us understand just how glorious it is. But we get a sense of how glorious future glory will be when it is set next to our present sufferings and the two don’t compare. Our present sufferings feel so big and weighty. But next to future glory they almost nothing.

What is the worst thing that has ever happened to you? What is the worst thing that could happen to you in the future? What suffering do you fear most in this life?

Take all of that. Take all of the sum total of your suffering and place it on a scale. It feels so heavy. But when you place eternal glory on the other side, your sufferings are not worthy to be compared with future glory.

In **2 Corinthians 4** Paul gives his perspective on suffering (**vv. 8-10**). How is it that Paul could survive affliction, being perplexed, persecuted, and struck down? Because of his perspective on suffering (**vv. 16-18**).

Paul says affliction is two things in **v. 17**: It is momentary and light. Affliction is **momentary** compared to eternity. If you suffer for 100 years in this world, what is that compared to eternity? It’s almost nothing. Affliction is also **light**. If you suffer for 100 years in this world, how heavy is that compared to the eternal weight of glory? It’s almost nothing. It’s like putting a **feather** on one side of the scale with **Mt. Everest** on the other side.

Present suffering cannot compare to future glory either in **duration** or in **degree**. Future glory is so much greater than present suffering that it is "far beyond all comparison." Earth has no sorrows that heaven won't heal.

Joni Eareckson Tada has been a quad for more than **55 years**. I can't imagine how difficult it has been for her. Then you add cancer to that. But do you know what 55 years of being a quad is? It is light and momentary affliction when compared to the eternal weight of glory.

In our church family, **Jeremy Spurling** suffered from ALS for several years. I can't imagine how difficult it was for Jeremy during those years. But do you know what several years of ALS is? It is light and momentary affliction when compared to the eternal weight of glory.

What are several years of ALS compared to eternity? What are 55 years of being a quad compared to eternity? It's just a blip. It's almost nothing compared to eternal glory.

For this reason, in his suffering, Paul was not crushed or despairing or destroyed (2 Cor. 4:8-9). For this reason Paul did not lose heart (2 Cor. 4:16). Beloved, this perspective on suffering will keep you sane.

How is it possible to endure the present sufferings of this life? By keeping your eyes on the future glory that God has promised you. When we suffer we tend to develop tunnel vision in that we become fixated on our suffering. We must resist that and fix our eyes on our hope of future glory. Your suffering will not last forever. As heavy as your suffering is it is bearable in view of future glory. When you look at your suffering on its own, it is so heavy. But when you look at your suffering in view of eternity, it becomes light and momentary.

Here is the Christian perspective on suffering: When your view of future glory is big your present suffering becomes small.

Conclusion: When our oldest child, Ian, was a baby he cried a lot. Sometimes we were at a loss on how to make him stop crying. Sometimes he would cry when we were driving in the car. And in my desperation to make him stop crying, I made up a silly song. It went like this: "We're almost home. We're almost home. Yippee. We're almost home." Most of the time, it didn't work. He kept crying.

But it works for the Christian life. When you suffer, remember what awaits you. Remember that God has promised you future glory. Remember that your suffering will not last forever. Remember that "We're almost home. We're almost home. Yippee. We're almost home."