

Worthy Suffering
Romans 8:18-29

Matthew 11:1-15

Matthew 11:16-30

Responsive Psalm 115:1-11

This morning we are going to be picking back up at verse 18, or Roman's chapter 8. In this passage Paul points to the hope that we have in Christ, a hope that exceeds the experiences of this life, a hope that exceeds our own expectations. Throughout his writing, and our studying of this book if there is one thing to take away from all of this, it is that Christ is central to everything, he is our hope in salvation, by his blood we have been redeemed, through him we find forgiveness and remission of sin. And it is through the ministry of the spirit that we know these things, as Paul wrote, "the Spirit bears witness to our spirit that we are children of God." Our standing before God, as righteous heirs of his kingdom is not a state of being that is born in the flesh, in fact that is what chapter 7 was about, the weakness of the flesh and the war against sin in the flesh.

If our hope is in this body, if our hope is in our own ability to live righteously, then we are of all men, most miserable for even we if we are honest, can recognize in ourselves the failure of such hope. Paul certainly did, verse 18 of chapter 7, "For I know that in me, that is in my flesh nothing good dwells, for to will is present with me, to how to perform what is good I do not find." He has concluded that there is nothing in his flesh worthy of redemption, a body corrupted by sin, but his hope, and likewise our hope does not rest on our ability to be sinless, but rather on the one who forgives, who offers deliverance from this body of sin and death. But, though that deliverance is sure, and guaranteed inevitable, it has yet to happen for all of us who are still here today, that deliverance from this sinful flesh will come by the death of the body, when we are no longer shackled to this body tainted by sin, but it is so sure to happen Paul implores his readers to live today as if it has already. And this is his key argument against falling into those sinful desires and practices that so plague us in this body.

Verse 12 that we looked last week, he says, "Therefore, brethren, we are debtors-not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh." Remember that we who are Christ's have died with him, no longer being bound in sin awaiting judgment, but rather we are forgiven awaiting glory. As we have stated over and over through these past weeks, the spirit works in us, and through us to do that which is pleasing to the Lord, the spirit works in us conviction of sin, and works in us the ability to flee from sin. Paul says through the spirit we can put to death the deeds of the flesh through the forgiveness of God's grace and mercy. Which brings us to our passage this morning, after Paul has given this instruction, showing that in Christ, those who have been given the spirit to walk in, find no condemnation, this is a precious treasure with no equal, that fact that we, fallen sinful mankind, who by our inherit nature are worthy subjects of God's wrath, he has instead chosen to forgive and not hold our sins against us. There is no greater hope, then to be the forgiven child of God who when we meet face to face will greet us with open arms just as the parable of the prodigal son.

And such a reality, and hope has practical implications into our lives today which Paul addresses here in verse 18. So let us go ahead and read our passage this morning, verse 18-27, you know lets go back and start at verse 12. It can be very hard for us to see what is right past our noses, we live in a linear timeline, each year, month, day, hour falling one right after the next and the moments we experience or are in are what we know. There is not a single one of us here who can say what tomorrow will bring, there is not a single one of us here today who can guarantee that we will even be here tomorrow, my point is that sometimes we can get lost in the moment and not see the bigger picture.

It can be hard to grasp a bigger picture that we can't fully see, so instead we doubt, we worry, we fret and become anxious over life, for this life is all we really know but in this passage Paul is pointing us to that bigger picture, reminding us that there is more than this life and honestly it is the life to come that matters the most. Which is why the gospel is such an urgent message, For you have today, you have now to listen and respond, your eternity counts on it. And for those who are the children of God, the sweet promise of the gospel helps to put the rest of life into perspective. Though we can only see, and know this moment, we have hope in our Saviour for a life far greater beyond this one, we get a glimpse of this in John's writing in Revelation, (21:1-4) “Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people. God himself will be with them, and he will be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, here shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”

What all this means has been speculated and argued among scholars likely shortly after it was written, the book of Revelation is steeped in imagery, and metaphor, while John who is given this revelation tries to record and understand in the best way he can. But one thing is clear, in that day, we will be united with God, and the sufferings of this present age will be no more, no more sin, our redemption will be fully realized. That is why Paul says, “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.” In 1 Cor Paul quoting Isaiah says that glory, “no eye has seen, nor ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.” The glory which shall be revealed shall be far greater than the human mind can invent. In Isaiah's original context, his message was given to encourage Israel that the sufferings they experience were of little consequence when being compared to their future blessing, and this is the same exhortation that Paul is using here to the church in Rome, and to us today who read these words. Through persecution, famine, and sword, there is hope for our home is not here, but is in paradise with our heavenly father.

I think that this may be a very important message for us today as well, the believers in Rome suffered great persecution under various leaders, and all of that Paul says pales in comparison to the glory that shall be revealed. Again I think we can take a lesson from Paul here to be less concerned about this life and focus more upon the spiritual. Many of our Christian brothers and sisters can get caught up in this temporal life, by that I mean, the cares of this life become overwhelmingly the focus. We see this largely in the political sphere, looking to politicians to fix everything that is wrong in our society, putting hope and trust in these men, when the reality is that God raises up kings, and tears down kings and he does so for his glory, and his purpose, and sometimes his purpose is fulfilled through unrighteous kings. Anytime I mention anything like this I always feel I have to put a qualifying statement, I am not saying that political engagement is not worth your time, or that it doesn't matter. What I am saying is do not put your hope in it, do not let it consume you. Though I think when Paul makes the statement, “for to be carnally minded is death.” or, again he says, “if you live according to the flesh you will die.” he is of course talking about spiritual matters, in other words don't look to laws, rules and traditions to justify yourself, but look to Christ, focus upon what matters, the one who by his blood purchased your redemption. But I think we can apply the principle of that thought here as well, do not focus upon this world, and do not put your hope here, for all that you will find in the flesh is death.

There may come a day when persecution comes, and honestly it seems that is the trajectory that we are heading in so while we have the ability to make choices there is nothing wrong in being involved in trying to do our best to steer away from that possibility, but knowing all the while that it is God who is in control and whatever may come, it is for his purpose, and his glory, a glory in which we will share, Paul says in verse 18, “even the creation awaits in eager expectation for the son's of God to be revealed.” One of the promises of God during the Babylonian exile was that the people will one day return to their inheritance, and a new creation will come. Isaiah speaks of this in chapters 65 and 66 where he writes, that the valleys will be raised up and the mountains made low, the desert will spring forth and blossom, and the wolf will lie down with the lamb. There are a few layers that can be unpacked here, there is the initial layer of the promise of Israel to return from captivity to their inheritance, to their promised land. But we also know that God in his infinite wisdom has used such events to teach deeper and greater lessons, for in this we also see our own pilgrimage through this life as we eagerly await the our inheritance. But we can also look at this passage of renewal, and new creation and see it in ourselves, the mountains and valleys of our life, the extreme highs and lows brought to balance through Christ for through all of it knowing Christ brings humbleness when we are in moments of high times, praising him for his mercy and provision, and knowing that Christ brings deliverance when we are low putting our hope and trust in him, balancing out this life through an understanding of his work through us.

We can also liken the flowering desert within our own hearts, what once was a dead barren wasteland has been now renewed to grow and show forth the beauties of Christ. God has taken what was dead, and created life making all things new in the hearts and minds of his children. And lastly the wolf lying with the lamb, people from all walks of life, with many a sorted pasts come to rest in Christ, in the people of Christ there is found peace, for it is with the lamb that we rest. And this all reflects the church as a whole as well, a body of believers, a new creation in Christ who spring forth life in this dead world, and who are like lambs among wolves. So yes, we are to engage in this world, as bearers of the light of the gospel of Christ, we are not to insulate ourselves into shut off gated communities to protect ourselves from the wolves, from the sin of this world, but we are to go forth and engage, share the word, shine as a beacon of hope into the darkness. That means we fight for what is right, what is just, and what is holy, applying the principles of God's word in that fight, being ready in season and out of season, in other words when times are good, and when times are bad to give an account of the hope that we have in Christ. For it is only through Christ and the calling of his saints can there be any true and effective change. Many say that we are in a civil war now, fighting over the culture of our nation but we Christians have been in that war for generations fighting for the lost souls of humanity, looking not to the physical outcomes, but to the spiritual seeking to bring the truth of the gospel to this dying fallen world.

To a world as Paul says in verse 20, is subjected to frustration, because of the curse of the fall, creation itself is subject to futility, all things die, all things are temporary and fade, it doesn't take long, 2 or 3 generations and what came before becomes a distant memory that eventually fades away. We are being shown a lesson in this reality daily, we are faced with death all around us, we are faced with things breaking, decaying, falling apart, we are faced daily with the reality that all things are temporary. And I think that it is by God's design to drive us toward something with meaning and purpose that is beyond ourselves.

Hence the rise of false religions, paganism and cults. Scripture says that man, in his natural state can not see, nor comprehend the things of God, yet we are given this intrinsic yearning for something greater than ourselves, and the even creation cries out as it has been corrupted and cursed in the fall of Adam into this cycle of death and rebirth. So man creates his own meaning, and his own purpose to fill that gap looking to everything else but God, in a final act of defiance making a mockery of God, creating for themselves gods, whether it be ambition and pursuits for success, money, and power, believing in some amorphous cosmic power, or worshiping creation, or even corrupt twisted versions of claims to believing in God, and some numb themselves through alcohol, drugs, and entertainment. This world has been subjected to futility, by the one who has created it to point to our need for him, and he is instilled in every one of us a need for something greater than us but even that has been corrupted by our sinful nature. Every bit, of us is fallen, corrupt by the curse, God told Adam, "You shall not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for in that day that you eat of it, you shall surely die." This was not merely a physical curse bringing death, but a spiritual one bringing with it a separation from God which is a eternal death, which we are all born into, and of our own sin and desire of deserving of.

Paul had already argued this in chapter 3, quoting scriptures he says, "There is none righteous, no not one; there is none who understand; there is none who seek after God. They have all turned aside, they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one." But, as he points out in chapter 8 here, there is hope, a hope that saves us from the pending wrath upon this cursed and fallen world. Verse 28 And we know that all things work together for the good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose." You want a meaning for life, that is your meaning, you have been called for the purpose of God, and part of that purpose is to be a witness and a minister to this dead and dying world, to share the hope, and be a beacon of his light into the darkness. So that, others whom he has called, may hear and believe. In verse 29, Paul gets into the reason we may have hope, the reason that we who were once estranged, cursed and apart from God have been brought near, "for whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." Mankind, by nature rejects God, can not see God, cares little of him, but has a need for him so creates for himself an image of God in his own mind, sets for himself a god to fill that gap, a god of his own making. Therefore it is God who must seek after us, it is God who must save us, it is God who must bring life to this cursed fallen dead soul.

And for those whom he has done so, we have been given such a great hope of redemption, we have become a new creature who can now see and hear God, recognizing the love he has for us, that while we were sinners, while we were at enmity and enemies of God, Christ died for us, so that we may be forgiven and brought into the fold. This salvation that he has given, is not a chance for redemption, it is not merely a possibility, it is a guarantee, sure thing for it is a work of God himself. Verse 30. "more over whom he predestined, these he also called, whom he called, these he also justified, and whom he justified, these he also glorified." This is you, today if you are believe, if you have the spirit of him who calls. If it was not for God's call, we would still be dead, for it is that call which springs forth life eternal. Paul wrote the same to the Ephesians as well, chapter 1, verse 3, "Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. Just as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." Paul believed that all those who believe on Christ for salvation do so because they have been predestined and chosen by God to be. It is by our corrupt nature and sin that we look at the work of God and say, " that isn't fare!" But Paul answered that too,

Which we are going to be getting into in the next few weeks, but he says, in chapter 9:21 “Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? We through Adam are all the same lump, but thankfully, through God's grace and mercy, from before the foundation of the world he determined that some would be made for his honor, to share in his glory, some will have that god sized hole in their heart be filled with the love, mercy, and grace of the one true God. We do not know who that may be, so we pray, and we share the gospel of this blessed hope, so that others whom God has prepared may hear and believe. Just as I was pointing out last week about assurance of faith through the ministry of the spirit, the same can be applied here. Those whom God has chosen out of the fallen lump of humanity, will be called, will be justified, will be glorified with him, there is no if, the sovereign God of creation has said it will be so. So, we can have hope in this salvation, that he who began it, will complete it and we will one day stand before the father as his children and hear him say, Well done, my good and faithful servant.