**Lesson 21: Suffering with Hope**

Text: Romans 8:18-25

**Introduction**

In the last lesson, we rejoiced in our adoption into God’s family. The Spirit brings us into this relationship and assures us of the relationship as we go through life. What a blessing to be an heir with Jesus Christ! If we are blessed to share in His glory, we must also be willing to share in His suffering (Romans 8:17b). Paul elaborates on the believer’s suffering in Romans 8:18-25. Suffering is the common experience of all who inhabit planet Earth. Being a believer does not exempt us. It is our tendency to think that God’s children should not go through hard times. The difficulties of life remind us that while our salvation is secure in Christ, we are not yet free from the struggles of this life. Suffering is “the dark backdrop against which the glorious future promised to the Christian shines with bright intensity” (Douglas Moo).

“Glory” is also a theme of this unit. Verse 18 and 25 both refer to the glory to come. Paul helps us understand that both creation as well as believers experience suffering. He also expounds upon the hope that we have in the midst of it all. If you have ever struggled with the question as to why suffering occurs, this passage can help you to have a biblical perspective and hope.

1. **The believer will experience suffering on the way to glory. (v. 18-19)**
   1. Paul said that the time of suffering does not compare with the glory that will follow. (v. 18)
      1. If you placed suffering on one side of the scale and glory in the other, the scale quickly tips in favor of the glory that is to come.
      2. While that is encouraging, it does not diminish the intensity of the suffering at the present. The suffering we experience may come in the form of natural disasters, disease, pain, genetic disorders, life-altering accidents, financial downturns, broken homes, the loss of loved ones, persecution, war, and other circumstances that can produce heaviness of heart.
   2. The day is coming in which the physical earth and believers will be completely free from the effects of the curse. Until then, there is eager anticipation on the part of all creation. (v. 19)
      1. The words, “earnest expectation,” are used to translate a noun that literally means “watching with the head stretched forward alertly” (Friberg).
      2. He personifies creation as though it is tiptoeing to see what life is going to be like without the effects of sin and the curse.
      3. This word is used three times in this passage (v. 19, 23, 25). It is also used in other contexts that describe the anticipation of the believer regarding Jesus’ return (1 Corinthians 1:7, Philippians 3:20, Hebrews 9:28). Paul mentions two entities that suffer prior to Jesus’ return.
2. **Creation suffers from the effects of sin. (v. 20-22)** 
   1. This refers to the physical world.
      1. Creation is not what God designed it to be originally. Animal attacks and natural disasters demonstrate that creation is suffering from the effects of the fall.
      2. It has been made subject to “vanity.” The word *vanity* in this verse carries the idea of frustration. God has *subjected* creation to this state as a consequence of man’s sin. Thankfully, it is not a condition that will persist.
   2. Creation itself will be set free from the “bondage of corruption” (v. 21). *Corruption* in this context refers to the ruin and decay that currently exists. “The ultimate destiny of creation is not annihilation but transformation” (Douglas Moo).
   3. Until that time, creation groans and travails in pain. (v. 22) Creation is sighing together.
   4. It is not only creation that is reeling from the effects of sin’s curse.
3. **Believers also sigh beneath a load of suffering. (v. 23)**
   1. Many of you know what it is to grieve over the loss of a loved one. There are times that all we can do is groan in pain together. Words do not express the grief that can come to the human heart. We long for the day when all the suffering will be over.
   2. In this verse, Paul says that believers have “the firstfruits of the Spirit.” The firstfruits of a harvest indicate that additional fruit is to come. The presence of the Spirit indicates that there is more to come.
      1. The Spirit is the pledge of our final deliverance.
      2. In Ephesians 1:13-14, Paul said that believers have been “sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession.” The Spirit is the down payment that guarantees the transaction will be completed.
   3. Regardless of what you are going through, the fact that you are indwelt by the Spirit indicates that you will ultimately be delivered from suffering. Until that date, we groan inwardly as we eagerly wait for the final redemption. The next verse unites this tension in a single phrase.
4. **Central Idea: Paul encouraged the believers to endure suffering by resting in the hope of the believer’s final deliverance. (v. 24-25)**
   1. We can go through this current time of suffering because we have been saved by hope. (v. 24a)
      1. The tense of the verb *saved* indicates that it is an action that has been completed. As believers, we are saved! The matter of our salvation is settled.
      2. The word *hope* means that there is more to come. We are already saved, but not yet completely saved from all that generates stress and sorrow. As those who have been born again, we eagerly wait for the transformation to be complete.
   2. We wait for that which we cannot currently see. (v. 24b) Our limited sight does not alter reality. For example, just because you can’t see the bus coming, does not mean that it is not.
   3. You must patiently wait. (v. 25) We can bear up under the pressure knowing that one day we will be free from suffering completely through Jesus Christ.
5. **Application: You can endure suffering by resting in the hope of your final deliverance.** 
   1. Since we live in a fallen world, we should not be surprised by the presence of suffering.
   2. There are benefits to suffering for the believer.
      1. Suffering keeps us from becoming comfortable in this world. It helps us to maintain an eternal perspective on life.
      2. Suffering causes us to look forward to our final salvation. “The believer does not focus on today’s suffering; he looks forward to tomorrow’s glory.” (Wiersbe)
      3. Suffering keeps us dependent on the Lord.
   3. The hope we have as believers does not lessen the pain that we experience today. It does help us to keep going when we are tempted to quit. We have the blessed hope of Jesus’ return (Titus 2:13).
   4. We ought to help those who are suffering without hope. While we cannot soothe all the suffering of the lost world, we can introduce them to the Savior, the hope of the believer.

**Conclusion**

No matter how intense the pain generated by suffering, it does not compare with the glory to come. In John 16:21, Jesus compared the suffering of this life to a woman experiencing the pain of childbirth. The pain is real and intense. Once the child is delivered, the focus shifts to the joy of having the child. A glorious destination is ahead for the believer. While we go through this time of suffering we have the Spirit to help us. We will consider this supernatural help in the next lesson.