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From Suffering to Glory

Romans 8.17-22

Series: The Pure Gospel

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The Village Church

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I. Introduction

- A. So, you go into a car dealership
 - 1. You've done your homework
 - a. You know which model of car you're interested in
 - 2. You talk to the salesman
 - a. And he tells you that, by golly, he's got just the car for you
 - b. He even has it in stock
 - 3. You're thrilled!
 - a. It's the make and model you're interested in
 - b. It's the color you wanted
 - c. The price is right
 - 4. So you go into the finance manager
 - a. You take care of the paperwork
 - b. Sign the purchase contract
 - 5. And the salesman takes you out to the lot to show you the car
 - 6. And there it is – a beautiful new car
 - a. But it's up on blocks
 - b. And it has no wheels
- B. You try to be nice, but can't help being Captain Obvious
 - 1. And you say, "Uh, well, that's very nice, but it's got no wheels."
 - 2. And the salesman says, "Oh, you want a car with wheels?"
 - a. "I had no idea!"
 - b. "That will cost you extra!"
- C. It's possible that you might feel a little bit like that in this morning's message
 - 1. You remember last week's message from Romans 8
 - a. And how wonderfully uplifting and encouraging it was
 - 2. It was about how we who believe in Jesus Christ can be affirmed in our faith
 - a. Through truths about how we know we belong to the family of God
 - b. How we know that God is truly our heavenly Father
- D. **Romans 8:14** (ESV) — 14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.
 - 1. And we learned about the different ways the Spirit of God leads us
 - 2. Giving us confidence that we are His sons and daughters

- E. **Romans 8:15** (ESV) — 15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”
1. We learned that the Holy Spirit, given to us in the new birth, was not given to us to enslave us
 2. But was given to give us new affections for our Heavenly Father
 3. And that through this indwelling Spirit, we can call God our Father
 - a. And more – that we can call Him “Abba!” or Daddy
 - b. A wonderfully intimate term of affection
- F. **Romans 8:16** (ESV) — 16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God...
1. And we learned that the Holy Spirit who indwells us communicates directly with our spirits
 - a. And as a mother or father sometimes does in times of grief or trouble
 - b. Simply holds their child
 - c. And without saying a word communicates that everything will be all right
- G. **Romans 8:17** (ESV) — 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ...
1. And finally, we learned that the Spirit of God affirms that we are heirs of God
 - a. Inheriting all the spiritual blessings that come with being a child of God
 - b. But even more – inheriting God himself as our portion
- H. What incredible truths!
1. What powerful encouragements to the children of God!
 2. What thrilling affirmations!
- I. But then we take a walk out to the lot to examine our prize
1. And we find that the last half of verse 17 was left out of the conversation
- J. **Romans 8:17** (ESV) — 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, **provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.**
- K. Wait! What?
1. Provided we suffer with him?
 2. We never talked about suffering?
 - a. What’s the deal with suffering?
 3. That’s like spiritual whiplash
 - a. We’ve been speeding along the glory highway
 - b. And then, out of nowhere, we’re rammed by a Mack truck
 4. Suffering? Really?
- L. Well, calm down
1. Suffering has a lot to do with what it means to be a Christian
 - a. In fact, without suffering, none of us would ever be a Christian

- b. Because Jesus suffered so that we would truly become a child of God
 - 2. But our own suffering has meaning and purpose
 - a. And that's what we're going to explore this morning
- M. **Romans 8:17–22** (ESV) —
 - 1. 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ,
 - a. **provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.**
 - 2. 18 **For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.**
 - 3. 19 **For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.**
 - 4. 20 **For the creation was subjected to futility,**
 - a. **not willingly, but because of him who subjected it,**
 - 5. **in hope** 21 **that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption**
 - a. **and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.**
 - 6. 22 **For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.**

II. **The Suffering Family of God**

- A. The first thing that we need to recognize about this text is that the family of God suffers
 - 1. You know that, don't you
 - 2. You know that without me having to tell you
 - a. You know it intuitively
 - b. And you know it by observation
 - 3. You know it because you all have been around long enough to have experienced suffering
 - a. And you know it because you have walked through suffering with your own loved ones – your friends and families
- B. But the key issue for us, in exploring this section of Romans 8, is that this text is in a section about affirming our relationship with God
 - 1. It is about proofs of our relationship with God
 - 2. Here are the proofs:
 - a. The children of God have the Spirit of God dwelling in them
 - b. The children of God are led by the Spirit of God
 - c. The children of God cry out to God by the Spirit of God, “Abba! Father!”
 - d. The Spirit of God bears witness with the spirits of the children of God that we belong to the family of God
 - e. And the Spirit of God affirms that we are heirs of God, and fellow-heirs with Christ
 - 3. And – **we belong to Christ because we suffer with Him**
 - 4. It is proof of our relationship to God that we suffer with Christ!

- a. Now, in what ways do we suffer with Christ?
- C. Well, the obvious one is **Persecution**
1. When we are persecuted for being a Christian, it is an affirmation that we belong to God, are part of His family
 - a. And that Christ really is our Savior
 2. Jesus speaks about this many times
 3. **Matthew 5:11–12** (ESV) —
 - a. 11 “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.
 - b. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.
 4. **John 15:18–20** (ESV) —
 - a. 18 “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.
 - b. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.
 - c. 20 Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.
 5. Jesus suffered
 - a. And by virtue of our being believers in Jesus, then we will surely suffer too
 - b. Lloyd-Jones: If you are suffering as a Christian, and because you are a Christian, it is one of the surest proofs you can ever have of the fact that you are a child of God.
 6. And not only that – if you suffer for Christ and as a Christian, Jesus says that is a blessing!
 - a. You are blessed, he says, “when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.”
 - b. Why?
 - c. Because “your reward is great in heaven.”
 7. So this truth, by itself, should lead you – not to despair – but to “rejoice and be glad!” (**Matthew 5.12**)
 8. Now you may wonder, “I don’t know if I’ve really been persecuted for being a Christian”
 - a. Perhaps not – at least not in the same way as some of our brothers and sisters do in other places in the world
 - b. Places like China, or in Muslim majority countries, or in other places where there is cultural suppression of Christianity
 9. But you may have experienced a milder form of persecution – even within your own families
 - a. It’s hard when your conversion to or commitment to Christ causes breakdowns in family relationships

- b. There are people who are listening to this message who have no communication with family members because of your commitment to Christ
 - c. A breakdown that has been exacerbated by the deteriorating ethical standards of our culture which are increasingly antagonistic to biblical sexual ethics
 - d. And that's hard, on a personal level
 - e. And that's a form of persecution
10. And at the same time, our culture is becoming increasingly antagonistic to Christianity
- a. We are being canceled in legitimate avenues of public expression
 - b. We are the focus of litigation with severe legal penalties and costs of defending ourselves when we seek to operate businesses according to biblical values
 - c. And refuse to celebrate others who demand that we affirm conduct which violates biblical ethics and profanes the name of God
11. So when we find ourselves persecuted, at any level, it is an affirmation that we do truly belong to the family of God
12. But what about other kinds of suffering?
- a. Where do those things fit in in terms of suffering with Christ?
- D. The second category, then, is **Refinement**
- 1. Not all suffering is persecution
 - a. Some of it is under the loving parentage of God who is refining us
 - b. Because our heavenly Father desires that we grow in holiness
 - c. Into the image and likeness of His Son Jesus
 - 2. In fact, God the Father did that with God the Son!
 - 3. **Hebrews 2:10** (ESV) —
 - a. 10 For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory,
 - b. should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.
 - 4. Now it's not that Jesus was sinful – far from it!
 - a. But still, that Jesus was shaped in His character through His own suffering
 - 5. **Luke 2:52** (ESV) —
 - a. 52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.
 - 6. Yes, even the sinless Jesus grew!
 - 7. Boice: "... Jesus grew into a wholeness of experience and trust in God through such things as poverty, temptation, misunderstanding, loneliness, abuse, and betrayal. God used these and many other experiences to 'perfect' him. He also uses them to perfect us."
 - 8. The images used in Scripture capture the essence of this refinement wonderfully
 - 9. **Zechariah 13:9** (ESV) —

- a. 9 And I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested.
 - b. They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, ‘They are my people’; and they will say, ‘The LORD is my God.’ ”
 - 10. So God uses suffering to refine us
 - a. So we will be affirmed in our relationship to Him, that we are His children!
- E. And the third way our suffering with Christ proves our relationship with God is through **Training**
 - 1. Paul tells Timothy:
 - 2. **1 Timothy 4:7-8** (ESV) —
 - a. 7 Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness;
 - b. 8 for while bodily training is of some value,
 - c. godliness is of value in every way,
 - d. as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.
 - 3. **2 Timothy 2:3** (ESV) —
 - a. 3 Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.
 - 4. **1 Corinthians 9:27** (ESV) —
 - a. 27 But I discipline my body and keep it under control,
 - b. lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.
- F. All three of these kinds of suffering should not be dismissed or avoided, but embraced as long as they contribute to our sanctification
 - 1. Which is what this chapter is really all about!
- G. The Refiner’s Fire (Jon Mohr; recorded by Steve Green)
 - 1. The Refiner's fire
 - 2. Has now become my soul’s desire;
 - 3. Purged and cleansed and purified
 - 4. That the Lord be glorified.
 - 5. He is consuming my soul,
 - 6. Refining me, making me whole;
 - 7. No matter what I may lose
 - 8. I choose the Refiner's fire.
- H. Now, why is it that we suffer so much?
 - 1. Why has God chosen to use His children in the “fellowship of His sufferings” in this way?
 - 2. The answer is that we live in a broken world
 - a. We live in a world of suffering

III. **The Suffering Creation**

- A. We can trace our broken creation all the way back to Genesis
 - 1. The world was created by God – and it was good, according to the Genesis account
 - a. Very good, in fact – when humanity was created, the crowning achievement of God’s creative acts

- b. Having made humanity in His own image
 - c. Morally responsible creatures with a capacity of having a personal relationship with their maker
 - 2. But as you know, those morally responsible creatures – Adam and Eve in the Genesis account – transgressed the Covenant of Law, the probationary requirement
 - a. And as a result, the curse of God in Genesis 3 prevailed
 - b. Not only on Adam and Eve and their relationship with each other and their Creator
 - c. And on the Serpent who was the instigator of the transgressor
 - d. But also on the natural world
 - e. Where the natural world would be uncooperative with humanity
 - f. Causing pain as in the childbirth of the woman
 - g. Causing all kinds of aggravation as the natural world would become a pain in the side for Adam in trying to fulfill God's command to have dominion over the world
 - h. **(Genesis 3.14-19)**
 - 3. The consequences have been felt ever since
 - a. And we see it in four ways in our text
- B. **Its Futility**
 - 1. **Romans 8:20** (ESV) —
 - a. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it...
 - 2. The futility of creation can be seen in a number of ways
 - a. The observation poetically expressed by Alfred, Lord Tennyson
 - 3. In Memoriam (1850)
 - a. Who trusted God was love indeed
 - b. And love Creation's final law—
 - c. Tho' Nature, red in tooth and claw
 - d. With ravine, shriek'd against his creed—
 - e. Who loved, who suffer'd countless ills,
 - f. Who battled for the True, the Just,
 - g. Be blown about the desert dust,
 - h. Or seal'd within the iron hills?
 - 4. Those sentiments prefigured Darwin's theory of natural selection which portrayed nature's constant contest for survival among and between species
 - a. In which brutal conquests of predators and prey dominated the world of nature
 - b. The survival of the fittest having supplanted any supposed human ethic flowing from a God who was love
 - 5. In a more contemporary vein, we might look to the current controversy over environmental concerns

- a. In which global warming, supposedly fueled (pun intended) by use of fossil fuels, creating greenhouse gases, has our planet on the verge of disastrous consequences
 - b. And so the policies driving the increasing use of renewables, pushing us toward the electrification of vehicles and the eradication of CO2 production
6. But the unintended consequences of those policies display the futility of human attempts at controlling the environment
- a. They include things like the use of off-shore wind farms causing environmental damage to sea life
 - b. Including whales, who are disoriented by the constant sounds
 - c. And the increasing pollution of the seas by shards of fiberglass and other unnatural elements in coastal waters
 - d. And of the depressing impacts on the fishing industry in areas supplanted by the monstrous windmills
 - e. Or the intermittent nature of wind and solar power requiring backup power sources using massive battery storage systems
 - f. Which require the use of rare earth minerals which are often mined with their own destructive environmental effects, and usually mined in regions of the world with poor environmental controls using child, or even slave, labor
 - g. Or the extraordinary cost of going green turning out to have nearly negligible effects on global surface temperature
 - h. Even while local economies lose resources
 - i. Which, if implemented, encourage third world countries to rely on even more destructive and pollution-producing practices, like a regression to using wood or dung in households for heat and cooking
7. Now I'm not commenting on the politics of the whole issue
- a. I'm simply pointing out that nature doesn't cooperate with the best of human intentions
 - b. And many of our most impressive technological advances have unintended negative consequences
 - c. Even the social networking which was seen to bring us all together in one big happy human family (Facebook)
 - d. Turns out to be the driving force behind teen depression and suicide
8. Nature "red in tooth and claw" is more pervasive than we'd like to admit
- a. The creation is subject to futility

C. **Its Bondage**

- 1. **Romans 8:21** (ESV) —
 - a. 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage ...
- 2. The bondage of creation is the cause of its futility
 - a. It conjures up the idea of slavery

- b. In which the constituents of nature are impotent to fundamentally change the current state of affairs
- 3. Boice: "... although nature does not want to be as it is, it is powerless to do anything about it."

D. **Its Corruption**

- 1. **Romans 8:21** (ESV) —
 - a. 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption...
- 2. Our natural world itself is corrupt and decaying
- 3. We have Antoine Lavoisier to thank for the doctrine that matter can neither be created nor destroyed
 - a. Einstein expressed it with theory of special relativity
 - b. **E-Mc²** – Energy = mass X the speed of light squared
- 4. But the problem is with the **Second Law of Thermodynamics**
 - a. Entropy – the dispersion of energy – always increases
 - b. While energy is never lost, it tends to be less and less useful and productive
- 5. Our sun generates an incredible amount of energy
 - a. But most of it is dispersed into the blackness of space
 - b. And sooner or later, it will wind down, use up its energy, and will be done
 - c. And so, when that happens, will we
- 6. The natural world is corrupt and decaying

E. **Its Groaning**

- 1. So it's no wonder the creation is groaning
- 2. **Romans 8:22** (ESV) —
 - a. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.
- 3. The creation is likened to a woman in labor
 - a. It groans
 - b. Its restless forces exerting whatever powers each element possesses to survive
 - c. Even as the universe winds down and disperses
- 4. And verse 23 recognizes that we also groan with the creation
 - a. For we feel its pain

IV. **The Hopeful Creation**

- A. Depressing, isn't it?
 - 1. But this is Romans 8
 - a. You're not allowed to be depressed!
 - 2. Because in spite of the desperation of creation
 - a. Its futility, bondage, corruption and groaning
 - 3. There is, even within the creation, hope
- B. **The Revealing of the Sons of God**
 - 1. **Romans 8:19** (ESV) —

- a. 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.
- 2. When the sons of God are ultimately revealed – in the final state of affairs
 - a. The creation’s groaning will cease!
- 3. Now the whole creation is not waiting with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God
 - a. Those who are unbelieving – as long they remain unbelievers – really don’t want to experience that revelation of the sons of God
 - b. Satan – who is himself a created being – an angel, fallen, wicked, and opposed to God – he absolutely doesn’t want to see that revelation
 - c. Satan is perfectly happy with a futile, corrupt, groaning world
- 4. But really the rest of creation really does long for the end to come
- C. **The Freedom**
 - 1. Because when that happens, there will be freedom
 - 2. **Romans 8:20–21** (ESV) —
 - a. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it,
 - b. in hope 21 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.
 - 3. When the sons of God are revealed – when the final state comes – the creation itself will be set free
- D. **The Glory**
 - 1. And not only that – the creation will share in the glory of the children of God
 - 2. **Romans 8:20–21** (ESV) —
 - a. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it,
 - b. in hope 21 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.
 - 3. The glory of the children of God
 - a. When the children of God are revealed, redeemed humans will become the people we were always meant to become
 - b. Fulfilled and complete in every way!
 - c. Restored physically – better than restored – having received new spiritual, incorruptible bodies!
 - d. Mentally restored – with minds that are completely devoted to the things of the Spirit
 - e. Cognitions that are congruent with the mind of Christ!
 - f. Hearts that are fully and completely devoted to the love of the Triune God!
 - g. The true glory of humanity

- V. **From Suffering to Glory**
- A. Suffering is the means to that end
1. Suffering is the path to glory
 2. **Hebrews 2:10** (ESV) —
 - a. 10 For it was fitting that he,
 - b. for whom and by whom all things exist,
 - c. in bringing many sons to glory,
 - d. should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.
- B. And as we share in the sufferings of Christ, we are being brought to glory
- C. **Romans 8:17** (ESV) —
1. 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him **in order that we may also be glorified with him.**
- D. Why can Paul speak like that?
1. Why can he say that in light of all the groaning?
- E. **Romans 8:18** (ESV) —
1. 18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.
- F. Suffering in this present time is not worth comparing to the glory!
1. **2 Corinthians 4:17** (ESV) —
 - a. 17 **For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison...**
 2. The suffering that is ours today will be “light and momentary” by comparison to the glory to be revealed
- G. Imagine one of those old time scales with a balance on one side and a place for a weight on the other
1. It’s like our afflictions in this present time is a feather on one side
 - a. A feather – which can easily be blown away in an instant
 2. And on the other side is a shot put
 3. The weight of glory will completely demolish the weightlessness of our current suffering
- H. Now, wait, you say: “My suffering doesn’t feel weightless now!”
1. Of course not
 - a. It feels overwhelming now
 2. But that’s because you can’t even begin to imagine what glory is like
- I. Boice: Suffering is heavy. It hurts. It can hurt so intensely that we scream with terror or cry out with pain. But, says Paul, the intensity of our sufferings is not worth comparing with the glory. And he should know. Paul suffered as much as any man has suffered, judging from his descriptions in 1 Corinthians 4:9–13; 2 Corinthians 4:8–12; 6:4–10; and 11:16–33. But he also had a vision of heaven’s glory, having been “caught up to the third heaven” (2 Cor. 12:2). In his opinion the intensity of the former is not to be compared to the grandeur of the latter.
- J. Our suffering affects our outward bodies, but our redemption concerns the real us, the new man

1. **2 Corinthians 4:16** (ESV) —
 - a. 16 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.
- K. And our suffering is temporal; our glory is eternal!
 1. 2 Corinthians 4.17:
 2. A “light and momentary affliction”
 3. “an eternal weight of glory”
- L. So dear friend,
 1. Do not be surprised at your sufferings
 - a. They are the proof of your belonging to your heavenly Father
 2. Let your sufferings remind you of the glory to be revealed
 3. Let your neighbors see *how* you suffer
 - a. That you trust in Jesus to carry you
 - b. That you find joy in the encouragement and consolation of others who see what true faith looks like
- M. The weight of glory remains!
 1. And even your suffering confirms that you truly belong to God and to His family