

July 15, 2018

Scripture:

Romans 8:18-39

“God’s glory first.”

After speaking about the glory of adoption into the family of God just prior to our passage in Romans today --- Paul --- turns to the troubled state of the world --- and the future glory that we hope in and look forward to in Christ.

And he paints a beautiful picture of the whole of creation waiting for the coming glory of God.

And part of the picture that Paul paints is the reality that we live in a dying world ----- and that we are waiting --- and longing --- and yearning for liberation.

And of course our liberation ---- comes only in the goodness and glory of God --- which is the triumphant arrival of Christ at the end of time as we know it.

And until that day --- until Christ returns ---- until the living Word of God that is Jesus Christ returns --- we only ever have glimpses of glory --- partial glory --- passing glory --- ephemeral glory.

But the day Christ returns --- then and only then will we have the total ---- full --- lasting --- everlasting glory of God ever before and within us.

And this total --- full --- and everlasting glory ----- will be greater --- and more powerful --- and more beautiful --- and all encompassing --- than anything we have never experienced --- or even imagined.

This side of the grave --- this side of Christ’s return ---- beauty fades and decays --- it’s momentary --- and short lived.

As Isaiah so beautifully put it ----

“The grass withers ----- and the flowers fall ---- but the Word of God endures forever.”

Pre - end of the world glory ---- eventually withers and falls --- and we quickly return to the reality of a dying world ----- in Christ at the end of time --- there will be no withering --- no falling --- no passing ---- no more decay ---- instead there will be eternal glory --- the likes of which we have never seen before.

And the hope in this future glory resides precisely in the knowledge that this kind of lasting glory has not yet been seen.

Our passage opens with ---

“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”

And then in verse 24 it's ---

“But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?”

We have never seen the glory that is yet to come.

It is beyond us --- and it is also beyond our capacity to comprehend.

And that is precisely why we are here --- at worship ---- to stand before --- or more appropriately to fall before the throne of grace in joyful anticipation of that future glory --- that is the coming in God's due time --- according to His will.

We come here in worship ----- to say to God --- “God you're awesome.”

We come here in worship to say to God ---- “God you are amazing and huge --- and wonderful ---- and splendid beyond measure.”

We come to say to God --- “We're overwhelmed by your goodness --- we're overwhelmed by your beauty ---- we're overwhelmed by your truth.”

And we come to say ---- “God we know there is a future glory compared to which nothing we have ever experienced can ever compare.”

As one preacher put it --- we don't come to hear little nuggets of wisdom on Sunday morning.

As pleasing as that can be -- nuggets of wisdom on Sunday morning --- that is not why we're here --- that's for Tuesday or Wednesday ---- or whatever day ---- that's for prayer or Bible study.

Monday --- Tuesday --- Wednesday --- and so on we work out what that glory asks of us now ----- but Sunday --- today --- here now --- we worship --- and worship is all about the grandeur and splendour of God --- and who He is.

We're here to encounter the risen sovereign Lord of the universe ----- we're here to a fall down on our faces before the beautiful Saviour ---- prince of peace --- great I am ---- good good Father and saving Son ---- King ---- Messiah ----- Holy One.

As Paul says in verse 31 today --- "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us --- who can be against us?"

What then shall we say about thee things --- the horrors of this world ---- greed --- fear --- anxiety --- negativity --- sin --- the prince or darkness ---- evil.

We gather not to hear little ditties like --- "a stitch in time saves nine" --- or "waste not want not" --- or ----- "repay evil with good" --- or ---- "if you haven't got anything nice than don't say anything at all." --- or ---- "be better ----- pay it forward ---- be nice to others."

As true as these things are --- these --- nor any other little nuggets of wisdom are not why we gather.

We gather because of our hope in the future glory of the Lord --- the glory that one day will change everything instantly and eternally.

We gather because of our hope in the future glory of the Lord that one day glory will no longer be just about passing experiences ---- glimpses --- and pockets in time and instead will be permanent --- eternal --- forever.

As Paul says ---

“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord”.

Nothing can separate us from the love --- and the beauty and goodness and the glory of God.

Not any of the things Paul lists here ---- life --- death --- angels --- demons -- -- height --- depth ---- and not any of the things Paul speaks about earlier in the passage either ---- things like suffering ---- and bondage to decay.

In verse 18 Paul says ---- “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”

And then in verse 21 it’s ---- “the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay.”

And then in verse 31 ----- “If God is for us who can be against us”

If God is for us --- it matters not who is against us.

If God is for us --- and of course He is --- if God is for us --- suffering matters little --- challenges matter little ---- bondage to decay matters little.

If God is for us --- it is His glory that we ought to chiefly occupy ourselves with.

God’s glory first.

“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?”

And of course the answer is none of these things can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And so instead of focusing on them we are called to glorify God.

Instead of concerning ourselves with hardships

--- with suffering

--- with challenges that sometime we quite frankly can't understand or even articulate other than knowing that they are real

---- instead of getting all caught up in them --- and how we feel ---- what we think should be done about them

---- we stop

----- we pause like we are here today now ----- and we glorify God by standing in His presence and thanking Him.

Let's all take a moment now --- to simply stand in God's presence and thank Him.

I don't know when the last time you stopped with all your concerns and simply stood in Gods' presence and thanked Him --- but we're going to do it now.

I'll start it off ---- and then you take it from there in the quietness of your hearts --- or blurt it our if you like.

Here we go ---- my simple prayer of thanks ----- let's pray ----

Lord God ---- I want to thank you for a beautiful wife --- for beautiful children --- for a home that comforts and food that nourishes.

Today Lord --- here --- now --- I want to thank you for being you --- huge --- and splendid --- majestic --- marvelous --- beautiful powerful --- loving.

And God thank you for sending your Son --- and thank you for being concerned with little me ----- how and why you would ever bother with me is astounding to me ----- little me a nobody --- tucked away ---- way off to the side in a place called Whitby in the middle of nowhere --- doing nothing much of any great consequence in this world --- just glorifying you --- thanking you --- reading your Word --- and serving and leading a small group of wayward pilgrims in barren land --- thank you Lord --- thank you Lord --- thank you Lord -- for caring about me a nobody --- in the middle of

nowhere ---- just doing my best to follow you --- and fall at your feet and glorify you.

And now Lord as we continue to pray --- hear us as we celebrate your glory

Take a moment now in the quiet of your hearts to simply thank God --- to glorify God.

Amen.

That's what Paul is talking about today in Romans 8.

Glorifying God in the face --- in the midst --- despite --- because of ---- in any and all circumstances ----- glorifying God.

And remember ----- Paul is talking about how the whole of creation awaits the full unleashing and revelation of the glory of God.

If we're focused on all the suffering --- "Poor me." ----- and foolishness --- "I know better --- just give me what feels good God." --- if we're focused on these things and not glorifying God --- we have missed the point of our existence entirely.

We are to glorify God no matter what our life circumstances.

And ----- the suffering --- and the glory we experience now pales in comparison to the beautiful glory that is yet to come.

That's what Romans is all about today.

Nothing of this world ---- nothing that happens in this world --- suffering --- decay ---- persecution – famine or sword ----- can separate us from God -----
- and ----- nothing of this world is more worthy of our attention than glorifying God.

God's glory first ---- period.

The question is ----- do we actually live in such a way that it is obvious that what we truly care about first and foremost ---- is glorifying God?

How does everything we do --- everything we think --- everything we are --- bring glory to God?

That is the question and the reality that God's Word holds before us today.

How do I bring glory to God --- how do I glorify God --- here now --- in this --- and every moment of my existence?

And sometimes it's in acting and doing and sometimes it is in resting and not doing.

Sometimes it is in speaking and sometimes it is in not speaking --- shutting up.

Sometimes it is in this and sometimes it is in that.

We have to be discerning all the time --- moment to moment --- as to how we can glorify God.

An act of glory at one moment can be an act of sabotage --- the next.

To everything there is a season the scriptures say --- Ecclesiastes 3.

The problem is we find a season we like and we want it to last forever ---- which only says we think we know better than God --- which is foolishness.

The world of faith doesn't work this way.

We don't ever arrive or land when it comes to faith ---- we are forever journeying --- and moving --- faith is never about holding --- it is about abiding.

Faith is never about holding it is about abiding.

When we are born we are soft and supple --- when we die we are rigid and hard.

Suppleness is a sign of life and growth --- rigidity is a sign of death.

Think of Peter at the transfiguration in Mark 9 ---- he wanted to freeze the moment in time and dwell there longer --- hold on to that moment --- build monuments and stop time in that one beautiful moment ----- but God had other ideas --- and they soon left that time on the mountain top --- and carried on according to the will of God.

Paul makes it clear today it won't all be smooth sailing but big deal --- the times of challenge as Paul says are not even worthy of being held up in comparison to the glory of God that will be revealed in us.

“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”

If we have gotten all excited about a moment in time that is or was beautiful --- great enjoy it ---- enjoy it for as long as it lasts ---- but when it is over carry on -- because in truth as beautiful as it was it is nothing compared with what is to come.

“But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.” - ---- Paul says in verses 24 and 25 today.

If what we see --- if what we have already experienced is all that we are hoping for --- if all we want is to return to another time that was fun and great and felt good --- that is no hope at all ----- that is what is called nostalgia ---- and nostalgia is always backward looking.

Hope on the other hand is forward looking.

“But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.”

If we've seen it --- if we've experienced it already and it has passed --- let it go.

“But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.”

Who hopes what they have already experienced Paul says ---- “But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.”

We do not yet have a full experience of the glory of God ---- that is yet to come --- all that we have experienced of God’s glory is partial --- as if through a glass and darkly.

The hope --- the hope for the future glory that Paul is talking about in Romans today is about waiting patiently for God to reveal Himself in ALL His glory and in His time.

“But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.”

It is coming --- God’s glory is coming --- and it is coming in His time --- and in His way ---- and for His reasons --- and whatever beautiful things you have experienced in the past are nothing compared to what is about to come Paul says.

If our response as we wait patiently for His glory is simply to long for the last great experience --- looking backwards in nostalgic sentimentality ----- we are misguided --- trapped even --- shackled in a prison of our own making.

The past --- no matter how terrible it was --- the past no matter how beautiful it was --- pales in comparison to the beautiful Glory of God that is still to come.

“But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.”

Who hopes for what they have already experienced --- not a person of faith that’s for sure.

We know that God has so much more beauty goodness and truth in store for us --- that the glory we have already experienced pales in comparison.

The whole of creation waits in eager expectation Paul says today in verse 19.

And in verse 22 it's the whole creation has been groaning in the pains of childbirth ----- waiting for the new birth to come.

And then it's --- and we groan inwardly as we wait eagerly --- as we wait eagerly for the full glory of God to be revealed and unleashed and unmasked.

When our rear view mirror is larger than our windshield we can't ever see what is before us.

“We know that in all things God works for those who love Him...” --- verse 28 today.

In all things --- not just the good times and great positive feeling times --- but in all things --- including the not so good times.

If we want our faith to only ever be like a day at the park --- if we want our faith to be all sunshine and butterflies --- cupcakes and rainbows --- we are not disciples of the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”

Paul doesn't debate the possibility of suffering --- it's real ---- it just is.

There is no debate as to whether or not we will suffer --- we just will --- it just is.

It's not if you suffer -----

It's ---- “I consider that our present sufferings.” --- and that is a bold and clear affirmation that we will indeed suffer.

Suffering is real --- the prince of darkness is real.

And until Christ comes again in all His glory ---- the prince of darkness will entangle us---- and distract us ----- and try divide us and hinder us --- and if we don't believe this ----- than simply put ----- we are naïve and simple --- to a fault --- a grand fault.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord but ourselves --- God doesn't abandon us ---- we abandon Him.

We think we know better --- we become complacent --- or we are too weak and when a challenge comes along --- we grab a photo out of the photo album and say I just want to go back there again ---- and be there again --- dwell there again.

Faith doesn't work that way --- "But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently."

If what we're shooting for is that which we have already seen ---- we're selling ourselves --- and more importantly we're selling God short.

We're dwelling on or in a glimpse of glory instead of the totality of glory that is yet to come.

"But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently."

"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."

And this verse could just as easily read --- "I consider that our present celebrations --- not just sufferings --- but our present celebrations ----- are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."

Why because ---- "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." --- verse 28 today.

And why do we know that our present sufferings --- and our present celebrations ---- are nothing in comparison to the glory of God that is to come.

Because --- "...he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." --- Philippians 1 verse 6.

Because --- “in all things God works for the good of those who love him...”
--- verse 28 from our passage today.

And because --- “... hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?” -- also from our passage today verse 24.

The day of Jesus Christ --- the day of the full revelation of the glory of God -
-- is what we hope for --- is what we look forward to ----- is what we are
pointing to today --- that is why we worship.

Not to get advice for good living ---- that’s week day exercise and priority --
- God’s glory is a Sunday priority --- not us and what we can do --- or do
better.

Sunday isn’t about us --- it’s about God.

In truth life isn’t about us --- it’s about God.

But Sunday for sure needs to return to being all about God.

That’s why we sing things like ----- “Let the glory of the Lord rise above us
---- rise above us ----- let the glory of the Lord rise above us.”

That’s why we sing things like --- “Amazing love ---- how can it be that you
my King would die for me.”

That’s why we reflect and gather around and celebrate with words like ---- “I
consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory
that will be revealed in us.”

And the last part is crucial --- “not worth comparing with the glory that will
be revealed in us.”

Nothing --- nothing sad or beautiful --- nothing challenging or celebratory ---
- nothing ----- nothing --- nothing ----- is “worth comparing with the glory
that will be revealed in us.”

The glory that is coming --- is so huge --- and so beautiful --- and so
splendid --- and marvelous --- and true that ever thing else in all creation
pales in comparison.

For people of faith --- it's God's glory first --- always and forever.

It's not just God's glory when I feel good.

Or God's glory but only when I get what I want or --- God's glory but only when I get it the way I want it.

That's nothing at all.

Rather it's --- God's glory first always --- regardless of how we feel --- regardless of what we think --- regardless of what is happening to us --- and in us --- and around us ---- and near us.

And it's not take out al old picture and think of that as the glory of God in its fullest --- everything pales in comparison to what is to come --- good and bad ----- beautiful and ugly ---- all pale in comparison ---- are secondary to the glory that is to come in Christ Jesus our Lord.

To God be the glory.

To God be the glory.

Say it with me ----

To God be the glory.

To God be the glory --- now and forever.

Amen.