

Evergreen Presbyterian Church

Pastor Adam Parker

March 26, 2026

Sermon Title: Christian Suffering

Sermon Text: Romans 8:17b-19

Rom. 8:15 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!”

Rom. 8:16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,

Rom. 8:17 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.

Rom. 8:18 ¶ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Rom. 8:19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

Main Point: Our present union with the Suffering Servant guarantees our future vision of the Glories of God.

Outline:

1. The Path of the Heir (v. 17b)
2. The Reality of the Groan (v. 18a)
3. The Weight of Glory (v. 18b)

Introduction

We are over 40 sermons into the book of Romans now, and I wonder (if you’ve been with us so far) how you might answer this question: “What would you say

the book of Romans is about?” Perhaps by this point if you’ve been here for the whole series so far, you might say, “It’s about the gospel,” or “it’s about justification.” I think those are good answers.

But I’m going to propose another possible answer, and it’s a bit more on the practical side. What would you think if I said, “The book of Romans is a book about glorifying God in our suffering”? Here’s my pitch for that. I don’t think I’d die on this hill, but it’s worth thinking about at least:

In Romans 5, Paul points out what suffering does (he says that it produces character).

Later in Romans 8 he tells us what suffering cannot do (it can’t separate us from God’s love).

In Romans 12 he reminds us that when we put the gospel into action we “rejoice in hope, [are] patient in tribulation, and constant in prayer.” He also tells us to bless those who persecute us. Again, he’s talking about how we suffer, there. He’s talking about the manner in which we suffer *because* of the Gospel.

And even in Romans 15, Paul prays that God would grant the Romans “endurance and encouragement.” He speaks to them as people who are either suffering, or who will suffer.

So even though the theological *core* of Romans is definitely built around justification by faith alone, throughout this letter Paul is always steering us toward a very practical application: that God would be glorified in us as we suffer. Paul is very concerned that we would suffer like Christians, and not like the rest of the world. We’re all going to suffer, because we all live in a fallen world. But the Christian... suffers differently.

And that seems to be what happens in today’s passage, because in this passage Paul contributes to what he says about suffering as he tells us that we should *weigh* our suffering. How should we do that? Well, he says we weigh it by putting it on one side of the scale, and on the other side we put future glory.

So this morning let’s listen to what Paul has to say about our suffering, and how we will suffer, but we’re meant to do so in light of the great and glorious future that God has for us.

1. The Path of the Heir (v. 17b)

Our first point is found in verse 17, and it's "the path of the heir."

The word "heir" is tricky, because it sounds exactly like the word "air" (A-I-R). But an heir (in this context) is someone who is inheriting everything that belongs to the one he is related to. In our case, if we trust in Christ, then we've been adopted by God (which we've seen already), and so we are heirs. Look at the second part of verse 17 here: Paul says that we are

"heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."

We are co-heirs. And the fact that we are heirs isn't some kind of legal fiction. We've been seeing this all through Romans, that by faith we are united to Christ. It is in our union with him that he is our head.

And in Paul's language here, it is a necessary part of being an heir that we inherit some of the very things that Christ also experienced. And that includes suffering.

You see, an heir has no choice but to walk where his Master walked. We don't get the inheritance (Christ) without the journey (in this case, suffering).

It's easy to go through a hardship and feel deeply discouraged and sorry for yourself, and to say something like, "God, why are you punishing me?" But Paul is telling us that the gospel redefines suffering for the Christian. Because in Christ our suffering is transfigured from being a "punishment" to being a "pathway."

I want to illustrate this from Peter Martyr Vermigli's life. In the early 1500s he was the Roman Catholic Prior of San Frediano in Lucca, Italy. He was a celebrated preacher, and a respected leader in the Roman church. He had comfort, authority, and the admiration of Italy's elite. But there was a problem: he believed the gospel. He had come to believe in the doctrine of Justification by Faith alone. And when the Roman Inquisition was established to hunt down people like him – like us – he faced a stark choice: remain silent and keep his status, or preach the Gospel and lose everything. And Peter Martyr chose to flee, to leave behind his

high office, his homeland, and his friends and spent the remainder of his life never really having a permanent home.

Now, how can someone do that sort of thing? Give it all up for the gospel?

It would have been incredibly easy for Peter Martyr to look at his life on the run... on the run from the Roman Inquisition... on the run (later) from Bloody Mary... and be filled with self-pity, and to turn his anger on God: "I serve you with my life, I tell the truth, I preach the gospel, and *this* is what you give me???"

He could have done that. It wouldn't have been right, but in some ways we would have understood it. But instead, he accepted his exile; and it was because he viewed it not as a stroke of bad luck, nor of divine punishment, but as proof of his union with Christ. Because as he saw it, if Christ was rejected by the religious authorities of His own day, then Vermigli's rejection by the Roman church was just a confirmation of his status as a "co-heir with Christ."

Imagine if we took hold of that truth for ourselves when rejection or suffering comes our way. We may not be hunted by the Roman inquisition, but we do experience hardships, suffering, struggles, and trials. We get sick. We experience money woes. We feel like we're on the outside of a society and a culture that doesn't have a Christian view of the world at all. That can be painful.

How do we face that? Part of Paul's answer is that we remember who we are in Christ: we're family. So stuff doesn't just happen to us. We have a father who loves us and who is over all. So we never get to see anything in our life as random.

That doesn't mean that we always know what God is doing in an individual instance, but it does mean that we know he loves us and that He's at work shaping us. We'll talk about this later in Romans in more depth, but we do have God's promises to cling to, even when individual events happen that we can't figure out what God is doing. In those moments we cling to being his children. We cling to his love and his promises and his wisdom and his sovereignty.

This is the path we walk because we are his heirs... because we're his children... we are his family.

2. The Reality of the Groan (v. 18a)

Second today, our passage acknowledges something important: the reality of the Groan.

In the first part of verse 18 Paul says, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing...”

We’ll get to the second half of this verse in a moment, but think about what Paul is leading with here. He isn’t dismissing the sufferings of this present time. At all. He’s not spinning it, he’s not minimizing it, he doesn’t spiritualize the pain away. He calls these things what they are: sufferings of this present time.

To be perfectly honest, I have tried this... and maybe you have too... it’s easy when you suffer to try to reason away how you feel. Maybe you use guilt: “Other people are suffering worse than me. I should be ashamed.” “Other *Christians* have suffered worse than me.”

Or maybe you use spiritual reasoning: “a Christian isn’t supposed to be sad. I’m supposed to put on a smile!”

Maybe you decide you’ve bought into stoic reasoning and think that because God is sovereign I’m just supposed to suck it up, swallow my pain, and be silent. And of course, that confuses stoicism and submission.

Maybe we try to reason it away by searching out our life and trying to figure out what we did wrong that is the reason why we’re suffering. This is the approach of Job’s friends. They are so sure that Job must have sinned in order to deserve his suffering. But they were proven wrong. But we think, “if I can find something in my life that shows I deserve to suffer, then I can take the blame and make sense of it, and make peace with it.” But again, Job showed us that this is the wrong way to think about suffering as God’s child. And the Scriptures tell us that our suffering is not punishment. Instead, it is God’s instrument of shaping us to be more and more like Jesus.

See, we might try to bypass the suffering, or deny it, or explain it away... But Paul doesn't bypass it, ignore it, or dismiss it. He doesn't say “Sufferings aren't real” or “Stop crying because heaven is coming.” Jesus wept at Lazarus’ death. We are

meant to react rightly to sorrow. Instead of explaining suffering away, his approach is, “Let’s *weigh* the sufferings.”

What does he weight our sufferings against? Well, in verse 18, he puts “the sufferings of this present time” on one side of the scale. He acknowledges they are heavy, real, and painful. They are what they are. And he faces those things head-on. And only *then* does he look at the glory on the other side of the scale, and he says, “Let’s do a comparison.”

3. The Weight of Glory (v. 18b)

This brings us to our third point... the other side of that scale: “The Weight of Glory.” What he says in verse 18 is:

“the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

So he says, “put our sufferings on this side. Man, they’re awful. They’re real, they can be agonizing. Sometimes they are truly horrible.” But then he says, “on the other side... glory.”

What is this glory? The ultimate answer is what is sometimes called the beatific vision. There is no greater consolation than seeing the face of God. To experience his presence free of sin, with a clear conscience, in the knowledge that we will one day have unfiltered access to God himself.

There is a lot we could say about the beatific vision, and it is a worthy subject for us to dwell on in another place perhaps. But Scripture tells us that there is coming a day when those who trust in Christ will see him with unveiled faces. We currently see through a glass darkly, but there is coming a day when we will know Him face to face.

And that glorious day that’s coming will transfigure our experiences of suffering. The Puritan Thomas Watson puts it this way:

“Glory is a weight; the one is light, the other heavy. The cross is light, the crown is heavy... If we could look upon the judgment-seat, and see Christ upon the rainbow, and all the angels around him, we should think our

sufferings here were not worth a moment's thought compared with that glory."

I was there for the birth of all my children. And every single time I was just amazed. Amazed. Amazed at my wife. Amazed at what the female body can do when it comes to developing, growing, and birthing a whole human being! I remember especially seeing her birth this child, and immediately the word that came to mind was "admiration." Wow. And part of the admiration of it was the feat, and part of it was the pain that my wife had to be experiencing. And I could barely guess at how much it must have hurt each time, with each child.

And moms love to tell birthing stories. They get together and they tell their story, they do like to brag a little about how long it took, how hard it was. But honestly, I never ever hear my wife or any other mom complain about it. They might *brag*, but they don't complain. They are so happy to have this child, and when they think of the pain it took to bring the child into the world, it's like even the pain is changed and transfigured.

How does this relate to Jesus? Because after I thought of this illustration I thought I was pretty clever. Then I remembered, Jesus gave the illustration first. John 16:21:

"When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world."

The pain is real. Nobody would say, the pain of childbirth is fake. But also now that it's over, what is that worth comparing to this *person* who is now in the world? Jesus says the joy of the *result* is so powerful it eclipses the pain of the *process*.

The Bible has lots of things to say – many more things to say – about suffering. And we will go there soon just a little later in Romans 8. But for the moment Paul wants us to think of our suffering like this: whatever we experience now barely deserves to be compared to what's coming.

Everyone suffers in this world. It's part of being in a fallen world. But there's a big and important difference between how we suffer apart from Christ, and how we suffer "in Christ." The non-Christian suffers and hopes for *relief* (she hopes for the

end of pain). The Christian hopes for *glory* (she hopes for the sight of God). Relief is temporary; Glory is eternal.

Conclusion

I want to go back to Peter Martyr Vermigli again. When he spoke on the subject of suffering in his romans commentary he said this:

“These things certainly seem terrifying to our human judgment at first glance. But just like wasps, once their sting is removed, can only buzz but not sting, so adversities, even though they sometimes attack godly people, do not cast them down. But since all things are ours, given to us through Christ, they do serve us for attaining happiness.”

This promise of glory—this hope of seeing God—is so real, and so powerful, that Paul tells us in the very next verse that the trees, the hills, and the stars are holding their breath waiting for it to happen to us. And we’ll give that more attention in two weeks.

But if you find yourself in a season of suffering – and perhaps it has been a very long season – Paul wants you to know, your suffering is real, it matters to God, and there is coming a day when it will not be worth even thinking about or comparing to what is coming.

Let’s pray.