

I. My Notes ... WWC message 8/16

II. Series: When Justice Meets Love

- Title: From Distress to Destiny
- Text: Romans 8
- Quote: Remember that in the midst of suffering God's will is being done. Paul Chappell (Pastor, Author)

III. Introduction

- Suffering is one of the most intensely debated topics when talking about God. Many people default to the question, "If God is good, why does He allow suffering?" Which is a loaded question. Too often, when a "why" question is asked it's an opening for a debate. This debate can take many forms. And I am not starting this way as an opening to define and debate the theology of suffering. That is for another time. What I will tell you is that evil exists ... simple statement to this point – how would we know and understand good if there wasn't evil? (I know, it's the opening for another deep discussion). With evil and suffering being facts of life, we need to look at the other side of this point. God exists. And because He exists, we can know love and grace even in times of suffering.
- Now, some well-meaning people take this to an extreme (you might know one or two). They interpret suffering as proof that God loves and values them more. The more suffering they endure, the closer they are to God, and the "holier" they are chosen to be. They look at suffering in the Bible – like the suffering Job endured and see a path that purified an unknown wrong. I don't think that is the reason suffering is part of life. It's true that lessons can be learned, character refined, and attitudes changed because of suffering. But the reason that suffering exists seems to be less about the test and more about the nature of the world and man.
- When suffering hits, and make no mistake, it will hit ... where do you turn? The problem with suffering is multi-faceted. Because of suffering we need to face our flaws and limitations. But to understand it we must look at what we believe and trust. Suffering and evil go hand in hand. That is not to say that all

suffering is due to evil influences. Sin (moral and/or spiritual failure) can result in some type of suffering. But this is the result of choosing to go man's way instead of God's. Is it possible to find a benefit due to the suffering you are (or might be) facing?

- I'll state the obvious – suffering, especially suffering today, is real. There is no doubt that there are difficulties, trials, and turmoil that brings pain and grief to our moments. Suffering doesn't make you less, it identifies you as human.
- Last week we began looking at (and talking about) the freedom and hope believers have through Jesus. We began by looking at the truth that there's no condemnation for those in Christ, meaning we're free from guilt and the bondage of sin because of His sacrifice. Jesus was born and fully human, so He understands our struggles and stands with us in our battles.

We continued by seeing what living by the Spirit instead of our sinful nature meant. When we follow the Spirit, we find peace and life, and we're considered God's children with an eternal hope. It's not about trying to be perfect by following rules; it's about faith (belief) and trust in what Jesus did for us.

Believers are adopted into God's family, calling Him "Abba, Father," and sharing in the fullness of life with Him. God's justice required a payment for sin, but His love provided the way through Jesus, giving us an inheritance and a place in His family.

- We can find encouragement to live free from fear and shame, empowered by the Spirit to live a life full of love and purpose. It's a message that reminds us of the amazing relationship we have with God through Jesus.
- Let's continue the story ...

IV. Now

- **Romans 8:18-19 NLT**

18 Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later. 19 For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are.

- As Paul explained earlier in this portion of his letter – justice was resolved in the face of love, the love of Jesus. And here he continues the thought. The

Apostle is not dismissing suffering, nor is he seeking it out. His focus is on the result of God's justice. That is the sharing of God's glory with Christ (vs. 17).

- There will be trials and struggles. There will be pain and despair. But according to Paul's words the hurt and anguish we experience at this time in our journey will not compare to the glory that touches our lives. This echoes what Paul said to the church at Corinth. *"For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory. So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."* (2 Corinthians 4:17-18 CSB).
- "Momentary light affliction" ... how is the death of a child or a loved one a momentary affliction? How about that medical diagnosis that arrived unexpectedly? The loss or devastation that accompanies disaster? The list could go on. Paul held to the viewpoint that all here is temporary and that in eternity God's complete restoration will change all.
- I might have you shaking your head after I say this, but here goes ... The suffering, this distress we endure allows us to have shared in a similar experience to what Jesus endured. **Hebrews 5:8** – *"Although he was the Son, he learned obedience from what he suffered."* (CSB).

V. What's Coming

- I come from a family of farmers. Our summers were spent on the farm learning the in and outs of working the land. It was challenging. A farmer deals with the difficulties that come with his calling. They can cause a lot of groaning ...
- **Romans 8:19-22 NLT**
19 For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. 20 Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, 21 the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. 22 For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.
- There are and will be tough times, but they will end. Paul compares this truth to a woman giving birth. The pain gives way to an incredible reward, a child. The

farmer may groan and despair. He may work hard and become weary. But in the end, the harvest is a wonderful thing. Something to be celebrated.

- Now, that may not mean a lot to you or me. The stresses of life in the city are different. But despair is something we all can relate to.
- Let's break this down. Creation is hopeful for God to restore all to its original intended purpose. According to what Paul has said, it is looking forward to it (it's hopeful). Creation was collateral damage in Adam and Eve's choice to sin ... to act contrary to God's intended purpose. But God has continued to allow life to progress along the path that was set after sin had occurred. Creation suffered (and it was an innocent victim to man's choice) along with humanity at existing in this fallen world.
- Yet there is going to be a reward. There is groaning in this moment – both from humanity and the entirety of creation but the future holds something more. This life, this moment, is temporary.

VI. Suffering Has Purpose

- Circumstances shape our viewpoint. Let's look at suffering from a different angle. I know people are hurting and this isn't to minimize that but to help find hope in the hard times.
- Suffering is hard, it hurts. Just ask someone in the midst of a tough time. It isn't comfortable. But joy can be found. **1 Peter 1:6-7:** *"6 You rejoice in this, even though now for a short time, if necessary, you suffer grief in various trials 7 so that the proven character of your faith—more valuable than gold which, though perishable, is refined by fire—may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."* (CSB).
- The "why" or what now" question is hard to answer during the hard time. When I had colon cancer, I was frequently asked, "why you?" I learned that it was during this time I found strength and comfort in prayer. The reasons for the cancer remained a mystery but the purpose became clear.
- Suffering can help us to find our reason – it proves us. **James 1:12,** *"God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him."* (NLT).

- From what I have learned suffering – distress and difficulty – are part of life’s process. That may be hard to hear because there are times that hardship is part of a path that we didn’t choose. When I read things that the Apostles wrote, I know that the challenges they faced brought them to a place of dependence and understanding. God’s love and grace reached them in their difficulties then. And it will reach us today.
- **Romans 5:3-5 NCV** ... *3 We also have joy with our troubles, because we know that these troubles produce patience. 4 And patience produces character, and character produces hope. 5 And this hope will never disappoint us, because God has poured out his love to fill our hearts. He gave us his love through the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to us.*
- **James 1:2-4 NCV** ... *2 My brothers and sisters, when you have many kinds of troubles, you should be full of joy, 3 because you know that these troubles test your faith, and this will give you patience. 4 Let your patience show itself perfectly in what you do. Then you will be perfect and complete and will have everything you need.*
- Just one more point. As believers we are called (it is our duty) to reflect Jesus to the world around us. This means that there are times when hardship and hurt become part of the journey. It’s not the circumstance that defines us; it is our response in the circumstance. Who do we turn to? Are we continuing to walk (act and behave) in a manner that reflects the love and grace of God?
- **Psalms 34:19 NLT** ... *The righteous person faces many troubles, but the Lord comes to the rescue each time.*

VII. Let’s Get Real

- We have been talking about suffering, about enduring the difficulties and hardships of the day, like it should be taken as a badge of honor. The Disciples counted themselves privileged to suffer for the sake of the Gospel (see Acts 5:40-41). Shouldn’t it be the same for a believer today? To see suffering as a mark of authentic discipleship.
- Paul explained it this way ... *“My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20*

NLT). And while this is a statement of understanding, it isn't easy. It's about trusting in the truth that God's way will bring you peace and hope no matter what is going on in the present moments around you.

- Paul suffered more than most for the sake of his relationship with Jesus Christ and the Gospel message. He said this to the church at Phillipi: *"For it has been granted to you on Christ's behalf not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him."* (**Philippians 1:29 CSB**). The word granted here means "shown favor, given freely as a gift." Paul does not present suffering as a curse, but as a benefit.

VIII. The Result

- **Romans 8:23-25 NLT**

23 And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us. 24 We were given this hope when we were saved. (If we already have something, we don't need to hope for it. 25 But if we look forward to something we don't yet have, we must wait patiently and confidently.)

- Because we are an integral part of creation, we, too, groan. We groan through the inescapable hardships of life in fallen creation: tragedies of financial ruin, broken relationships, nature's disasters, terminal illness, and inevitable death. Moreover, we groan as the drag of the flesh keeps us from enjoying complete and uninterrupted intimacy with our Creator. We are like children in an orphanage, waiting with bags packed and completed adoption papers in hand for the coming of our Father ... whom we can call "Daddy" (8:15). (Charles R. Swindoll, Romans, vol. 6, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2016), 182.)
- Yes, there is still pain, and we long for relief. It is a natural result of what it means to be human. I'm not trying to explain away the hurt and pain, nor do I want to minimize the distress that suffering brings. The truth is that by choosing Jesus you are set against what the world wants or will tell you is the "right" way to live.

- In his letter to the churches in Galatia, the Apostle Paul stated, *“For am I now trying to persuade people, or God? Or am I striving to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.” (Galatians 1:10 CSB)*. By choosing God’s way it is almost a guarantee that we will be misunderstood, criticized, and ridiculed. Life is hard enough but choosing to live by a different standard that what the world deems as proper will add to the daily challenge.
- Paul tells us that our “groaning” will be resolved by the hope that we carry because of our belief and trust in the One who loved me and gave Himself so that I might find meaning and purpose.

IX. Last Words

- What we’ve learned in this moment is that groaning is not a sign of weakness, it’s a sign of longing. Creation groans. We groan. Even the Spirit groans. But all of it points forward to the promise of God’s glory. The Apostle is telling us that following Christ doesn’t promise a pain-free life—it promises a purpose-filled one. The sufferings of this present time are real, but they are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed. That’s not denial, it’s defiant hope. So, if you’re groaning today—under grief, uncertainty, or weariness—know this: you’re not alone. And you’re not stuck. You’re waiting. You’re anticipating. You’re anchored in hope that doesn’t disappoint. You are living with trust and belief in the promises of the Lord God who lived and endured the things that you are facing.
- Because the God who subjected creation in hope is the same God who will redeem it in glory. And the same Spirit who groans with you now will one day rejoice with you then.
- So, in your waiting, wait well. Groan honestly. And hope fiercely. Glory is coming.
- May the God of all hope fill you with courage in your groaning, patience in your waiting, and joy in your anticipating. May you walk through suffering with eyes fixed on glory and may the Spirit within you bear witness that you are not forgotten, not forsaken, but being formed for the fullness of redemption.

- Keep looking to the One who makes all things new—who turns groaning into glory and waiting into worship.
- Let's Pray
- Grace First, Grace Always