

1. After terrorist attack on Twin Towers, memorial service held for 3000 murdered. (**SHOW**)
 - a. Billy Graham was one of speakers. Said if had \$1 for every time asked this question:
 - b. Why does God allow pain & suffering? (**SHOW**), he'd be a rich man.
 - c. This is one of our most persistent & difficult questions, especially when we are hurting.
2. I became a senior pastor 28-yrs-ago this summer. I was 29-yrs-old.
3. As young pastor one of my most dominant impressions was how much people suffer.
4. Today I want us go one of grtest passages deals w/issue of suffering – Romans 8. (**SHOW**)
5. Romans 8:18-25 teaches us that suffering has an important place in the Christian life.

I. Suffering is very light, v. 18.

A. Suffering Is Insignificant, of little consequence.

1. A statement like this shocks us. Suffering is devastating & often overwhelming.
2. It can be life-threatening. I think of a dear lady had open heart surgery at U of M.
 - a. Surgery went fine; one wk later she had 3-strokes. Paralyzed, unable talk or move.
 - b. Languished in Ann Arbor one month; finally transferred to home hospital where died.
 - c. Last thing she said to me barely able to speak was Why? She was devastated.
3. This verse does not mean suffering is not hard to take.

B. Suffering Is Light Compared to Something Else – Glory.

1. This = perspective of faith. Nonbelievers see suffering only in light of present.
 - a. They live for this life alone and what they can get out of it.
 - b. Enjoyment, possessions, wealth, status, friends, family, achievement.
 - c. When tragedy strikes, what is lived for is gone.
 - d. Life is full of misery, loneliness, & suffering – and it's all over much too soon!
 - e. Suffering is viewed only pessimistically – as harsh and life crushing.
2. But believers see suffering in light of the future.
 - a. This life is only small part of the picture. We live for eternity & all God promises.
 - b. This world is destined to pass away.
 - c. We see suffering optimistically – as tiny part of huge picture, (see 2 Corinthians 4:16).

C. This Is Why Paul Can Say What He Does.

1. Phrase Paul uses for not worthy comparing is a measuring term.²
 - a. It was an object heavy enough to promote motion in a balance scale.
 - b. We would say the object is heavy enough to tip the balance. (**SHOW**)
 - c. When I show you this image immediately you realize it's an optical illusion.³
 - d. Rock far outweighs the feather & clearly would create motion tipping the balance.
 - e. We often live this way as believers because we can't see weight of future glory.
 - f. In our mind the suffering is equal to or greater than the glory to come. Illusion!
 - g. So weighty & transcendent is the glory that suffering is like a feather in comparison.

¹ Woody Allen, <http://izquotes.com/quote/3615>. Accessed 4/16/15.

² Strong, J. (2001). *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software. Definition #1.

³ Feather counterbalances rock. <http://www.davidairey.com/on-designers-critiquing-designers/>. Accessed 4/16/15.

2. C.S. Lewis preached *The Weight of Glory* to explain what eternity will be like.⁴ 5 things:
 - a. We will be with Christ. We will be like Him. (SHOW)
 - b. We will have glory (the luminosity that comes from God's presence).
 - c. We will be feasted. We will have official positions in the universe.
3. All of this will be so transcendently wonderful it far outweighs our suffering.

II. Suffering will not last, vv. 19-21.

A. Suffering Is Temporary, Only Lasts A Short While, v. 19.

1. Paul uses creation or nature to illustrate his point.
 - a. Creation is going to participate in the glory of God's children.
 - b. In the future things are going to be drastically different than they are now.
2. The natural world looks forward to that time with eager anticipation.
 - a. The cluster of terms used for this in v. 19 is expressive.
 - b. Lit. = the creation eagerly expecting awaits eagerly.
 - c. Carries the idea of craning the neck or stretching the head forward to look.⁵
 - d. The whole creation is on tiptoe to see wonderful sight of the sons of God coming into their own.⁶
 - e. Creation longs for the day when suffering will be over.

B. Reason For Creation's Longing, vv. 20-22.

1. V. 20. Paul referring, of course, to curse God put on earth for man's sin, Gen. 3:17-19.
 - a. Our text defines this as being subjected to futility. Futility suggests frustration.⁷
 - b. Earth is frustrated. Frustration is the inability to obtain one's goals.
 - c. The curse barred nature from the fullness of fertility/harmony.
 - d. God's plan was that the earth would multiply/be fruitful.
 - e. Instead creation is afflicted w/bondage to decay because of man's sin, v. 21.
 - i. Nature has been enslaved to decay, deterioration, and death.
 - ii. This is so obvious it is all around us. Spring found dead rabbit under our window.
 - iii. It was a good sized rabbit appeared healthy but it didn't survive our winter.
 - iv. It's the 2nd dead rabbit found over yrs in Spring not strong enough to survive.
 - v. One died before get to vet. Severe winter is evidence of the curse killing animals.
2. So frustrated is nature that it actually laments its condition, v. 22.
 - a. Earth groans like woman in labor. Floods, hurricanes, droughts, tornadoes →
 - b. Blights, avalanches & earthquakes are the birth-pangs of nature.
 - c. It wants desperately to be delivered.⁸ One day it will be!
 - i. V. 20 says God cursed it w/a promise of hope. The hope is declared in v. 21.
 - ii. Following the 2nd Coming of Christ the creation will be renewed.
 - iii. The groaning creation will be a glorious creation. Curse will be removed.

⁴ Hughes, R. K. (1991). *Romans: righteousness from heaven*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, p. 158.

⁵ Vine, W. E., Unger, M. F., & White, W., Jr. (1996). *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Nashville, TN: T. Nelson. Strong's #603.

⁶ J. B. Phillips. *The New Testament in Modern English*, rev. ed., Romans 8:19.

⁷ *The Amplified New Testament*. (1987). La Habra, CA: Zondervan; The Lockman Foundation, Romans 8:20.

⁸ Hughes, op. cit., p. 160.

- iv. Death & decay will be gone. Natural disaster will cease.
- v. Nature will be free to produce as designed, free from pestilence & decay.
- vi. Every believer will return w/Christ to see that Day, live in it & experience it!

III. Suffering creates a longing, vv. 23-25.

- 1. Paul moves from the illustration in nature to the application to believers.
- 2. He says we groan also – for two reasons.

A. To Be Free From Present Pain, v. 23.

- 1. I am told that labor pain is one of the worst pains imaginable.
 - a. The closest men ever come to that kind of pain is if they have kidney stones.
 - b. Groaning is the reaction to pain – the pain of life in a fallen world.
- 2. I've had funerals for three children. One was a 6-yr-old girl accidentally killed by father.
 - a. Girl's uncle said his sister's wailing over her child was worst sound ever heard.
 - b. He said, *I hope I never hear that kind of wailing ever again.*
- 3. What this groaning tells us is that we are living in a sin-cursed world.
 - a. It's a world of selfishness, violence, inhumanity, falsehood and death.
 - b. God allows pain so we'll not be comfortable in this world but long to be free of it.

B. To Experience Our Future Promise, vv. 24-25.

- 1. V. 24 draws the parallel between creation and us.
 - a. As nature was cursed in hope, so believers are saved in hope.
 - b. As nature is on tiptoe **waiting** for deliverance, so are we, v. 25.
 - c. The same word for nature's **waiting** is used for our **waiting**.
- 2. Sometimes I will ask Christians, *Did you get all your salvation when you were saved?*
 - a. Why of course! Think again. V. 23 says we only have *first-fruits of the Spirit.*
 - b. First-fruits is only the beginning, the down-payment. There is more to come.
 - c. We are still awaiting *the redemption of our bodies,* v. 23.
 - d. Redemption includes the liberating of our soul and our body.
 - e. We won't be completely saved until we have our new bodies.
- 3. It has been encouraging to read what God is teaching Matthew Songer thru cancer.⁹
 - a. **First**, I grieve for folks that don't have family & friends to support them. I can't imagine going thru this treatment alone. Your support is worth more than money, power, prestige or any kind of success. **Second**, it is relatively easy to have faith & trust in God when facing disease, death or any great trials. There aren't any real viable alternatives. This is a good thing, one can transfer their trust [to] an all-powerful God vs. our own strength. **Third**, my faith has suffered most when things were going really well. It is the hardest to have overcoming faith when I was being blessed by God. None of us knows what is going to happen tomorrow. God wants us/me to trust Him and serve Him when things are going really well.
 - b. Suffering is purifying Matthew; creating greater longings in his heart. That's why?

⁹ Email from Matthew Songer in Houston, 4/14/2015.