

Christian suffering

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[0 : 00] Will you turn with me now for a little time as we meditate together in a portion we have read from God's word. The epistle of Paul to the Romans on the 8th chapter, reading again at verse 18.

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

There is clearly, my friends, a close connection between Christian suffering and the glory to be yet revealed.

There is an interrelation and an interaction and the one has an intimate bearing on the other. However, the sufferings of this present time, they are a necessary preparative for the glory that is to be made known in time's future.

This is not to say that there is no glory, that there is no sweetness, and that there is no sense of blessing in present sufferings as such.

[1 : 11] Very, very often in the course of history, the suffering and sifting and sifted believer has had such an awareness of the presence of Christ with him that he has felt himself to be on the very borders of heaven and would not exchange his lot for all the riches that this world could provide him with.

But while this may well be true and has been true on many occasions throughout history, it is nevertheless not the glory spoken of here.

It is not the glory which shall be revealed in us. In the most ecstatic moments of happiness and blessedness here, there is of course suffering associated with it and attached to it because we are still in an environment where this is the order of things.

But we must ever bear in mind, in the midst of the most inscrutable experiences of life, that suffering is a necessary and vital preparative for participating in the glory that lies before us.

The apostle puts the matter very clearly in 2 Corinthians chapter 4, in these words, our light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal wit of glory.

[2 : 59] It works for us. It is active, as the apostle, in this direction, that is in the direction of fitting us and equipping us for the glory that is yet to be made known.

Now then, through Christian suffering, or the suffering believer is never isolated or unrelated or unconnected in his sufferings.

A believer never suffers in solitariness. He never suffers alone. These words have to be about text, they have to be taken in connection with the last clause of verse 17, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together, for I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

Fellowship, this is what we are to understand by what the apostle elsewhere calls the fellowship of his sufferings in Philipians and the third chapter.

We observe in the first place the sufferings of this present time and how we are to respond to them. And as I have already mentioned these words in verse 17, they're a clear pointer to us in this respect.

[4 : 28] If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. What are we to understand by these words? What do they mean?

Well, then the sufferings of our Lord are to, I think, to be regarded from a twofold angle. We know, of course, that he suffered as the propitiation for our sins.

He was made sin for us who knew no sin, so that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. He propitiated the wrath of God for his people.

He bore our sins in his own body on the tree. He was wounded for our transgressions, says the prophet. He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon him.

With his stripes we are healed. But in these sufferings his people can have no part whatever, and they cannot enter into them.

[5 : 33] He alone was the sacrifice offered for our sins. He alone made satisfaction to the justice of God on our behalf and made, and wrought out salvation for us.

He trod the winepress of these sufferings in this respect alone, and of the people there was none with them.

There could not be any with them in the course of suffering as the propitiation for our sins. But then, too, we have to remember that suffering was the road that conducted him to glory.

Every inch of that way was strewn with suffering for a man. This surely, and I believe, is the practical implication for his people in the way he reacted in the face of these sufferings, and it is certainly how the apostle Peter viewed the matter.

Where he says in 1 Peter 2 at verse 21, For even here unto where ye called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow in his steps.

[6 : 56] And here is the application, Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth. Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again. When he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.

That ye should follow in his steps in that respect. Suffering, then, is a peculiarity in the earthly lot of all the heirs of heaven.

They are all called to suffer with Christ. He is to be the pattern of their condition. He is to be the exemplar in their conduct. And this surely leads us to inquire what sort of attitude does such a pattern demand of the heirs of glory.

What kind of spirit should be displayed by them as they suffer with him. Well, surely for one thing, it calls for a spirit of calm resignation.

And the Savior himself is our supreme pattern in this regard. The calmness and resignation and dignity with which he faced his commitment is altogether magnificent.

[8 : 11] When the hour was come, he set his face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem, we read. And he himself said, The cup which my father hath given me, shall I not drink it?

That he was acutely sensible of the awesome ingredient of suffering. In that cup is evident from his own anguished cry, Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.

But then he went on to say, Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done. And this is a spirit which suffering with him implies and supposes for the believer.

And this is a fortitude which his grace alone can supply and does supply for the Christian in the face of suffering. And so suffering with him, it calls solely for a spirit of calm resignation.

It calls also for a spirit of quiet serenity. And again, this is in its most exquisite form.

[9 : 24] We see it in the one who is the author and the finisher of our faith. As we read through the account of his sufferings in the Gospels.

As we read there of the farcical trial to which he was subjected, we are immediately gripped by the calm serenity of the accused and the desperate antics of his accusers as they sought to bring false accusations against him.

Peter was present. Peter, we believe, observed that mock trial. And it obviously made a lasting impression on his own mind.

For many years afterwards, he writes these words. Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again. When he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him who judges righteously.

He answered them, we read, never a word. He was silent before them. He gave his back to the smiters in silence and his dignity and his serenity.

[10 : 38] They were apparent to all. And with his believing child, not desire to be gripped with the same spirit as he was gripped with.

And as he displayed the spirit in the world. And then, too, suffering with him surely calls for a spirit of selfless devotion, as was so clearly displayed by our Savior.

Towards the one whose servant he was and whose will he was performing in this world. The cup which my father, he says, hath given me, shall I not drink of it?

I delight to do thy will, O my God, yea, thy law is within my heart. And if a cup of intense suffering is what the Lord wills for his dear child, will not that child, under the tutorship of the spirit, seek to say, I delight to do thy will, O my God?

I would not have it in any other way. I would, this is what thou hast ordained for me. And I know that thou doest all things well.

[11 : 55] Enable me, therefore, to kiss that rod. And the one who has appointed the rod for me. And so it calls for this spirit of selfless devotion to the one who has called for this.

And truly also suffering with them calls for a spirit of undeviating steadfastness, as was so clearly apparent in the ministry and in the suffering of our Savior.

Undeviating steadfastness without wilting, without fainting, without stumbling anywhere. The steadfastness of the Lord in the face of the awesome task before him is an outstanding characteristic of his atoning ministry.

Nothing and no one could divert him from that purpose before him. He had a baptism to be baptized with, and he was straightened until it was accomplished.

And let us remember, my dear friends, that suffering with him demands and requires such a spirit. Remember how eloquently this is expressed in Hebrews chapter 12.

[13 : 06] Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every wit and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience, with steadfastness, the rest that he said before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith.

And so it calls for this spirit of undeviating steadfastness in the way in which we have been placed. And even calls, we suggest, for a spirit of inner rejoicing.

For no man can rejoice outwardly in suffering as such. That is something that is impossible. The blessed Savior was essentially the man of sorrows and acquitted with grief.

How could he be anything else when confronted with what was given to him? But at the same time, he possessed an inner reservoir of joy which nothing could remove from him.

We read that he rejoiced in spirit. We read that for a joy that was said before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame. And when he is conveyed to the believer by the spirit that he is suffering with Christ, he will have a similar spirit, a similar reservoir of inner rejoicing, that he is permitted thus to be honored by his Lord and by his Master.

[14 : 42] But then too we see the sufferings of this present time and how we are to relate them to the future.

And this is what the Apostle is referring to in our text. I reckon he says that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

This is the reckoning of the man of God. This is the balanced, calm, considered, summing up, often of the situation in which he is placed in this life.

I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. And he is of course thinking here of the glory of the heavenly state, the state triumphant, the day of the believer's coronation and acquittal.

Here in this scene of suffering the Christian is only afforded brief, fleeting glimpses of the glory that lies in the future.

[16 : 06] He does indeed get glimpses of this glory. But there are so many detracting objects in the Christian's experience, not least of them perhaps the wine of astonishment itself, which is given to him to drink.

But these mystifying episodes must be kept in perspective and considered in the light of the glory that is yet to be. I reckon that the sufferings of this present time, to the apostle, are not worthy to be compared.

They fall into insignificance in comparison with the glory of the heavenly state. And he is no doubt thinking of particular aspects of that state.

He is thinking of the glory of the fellowship of that state. Sometimes the sufferings and the suffering scene of the present casts a shadow over the fellowship of God's people, the fellowship that they enjoy with their Lord and Master.

There are other times, of course, when the fellowship of heaven can be more meaningful than ever it was in a season of ease, that is, in a time of affliction. But sufferings themselves, they can disorientate the mind so that the believer is not able to stay his mind on those things relative to his peace.

[17 : 36] And he is therefore disquieted, he is disturbed, he is distressed by virtue of all that is crossing his path. But in the state of glory, which the apostle is referring here, the fellowship will be uninterrupted because these elements, which so powerfully militated against it here, will be excluded in that state.

You see, the whole process of life here is geared to the severing of the connection between God and his people, between, to the breaking of that fellowship, to the destroying of that fellowship, between God and his people.

But yonder, in the state of glory, these elements will be excluded. And so, it will be a state in which the fellowship will be total, in which it will be complete.

I believe that the words are the apostolic thinking of the glory of the fellowship of that state. But the words also truly refer to the glory of the knowledge of that state.

One of the great factors that adds to the anguish of the present sin is why God permits it. Why some suffer to such, to a much greater degree than others?

[19 : 09] Why he allows it to continue over a long period of time? These are questions, my friends, for which there is no real answer. They are questions that we cannot find an answer to in this life, except to submissively say with the Lord, even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.

What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know it hereafter. The day of glory, when the day of glory will break in upon the glorified saint, then it will be seen what he had in mind.

Not till the loom is silent and the shuttles cease to fly. Will God unfold the canvas and explain the reason why?

The dark threads are as needful in the weaver's skillful hand as the threads of gold and silver in the pattern he has planned.

The glory of the knowledge of that state when we shall know even as also we are known. But then too, surely the words speak of the glory of the service of that state.

[20 : 40] In every sphere of life here, the Christian is called to serve his Lord and his Master. He is called to serve in life and in death, in health and in strength, in poverty and in wealth, in youth and in old age.

But our service at its very best is marred with failure. It is marred with sin. It is marred with frailty and stupidity and ineptitude on the part of every one of us.

We are veritably unprofitable servants, although we are called to servitude. But in the state triumphant, his people are said to serve him day and night in his temple.

They will have no occasion to mourn over their lack of service or their lack of commitment as they so often have to mourn in this valley of tears and in this veil of suffering.

The glory of the service of that state, it will be total and it will be complete. But then too, he is thinking surely of the glory of the felicity of that state.

[21 : 54] They shall hunger no more. Said John in Revelation chapter 7, neither thirst any more, neither shall a sun light on them nor any heat.

For the lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them and shall lead them to living fountains of water and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

Here, there is brought out the great contrast between the present sin of suffering and of need and the future glorious state of the redeemed when every conceivable want and need shall be eternally and fully supplied.

The present sin in virtue of its very nature is an environment of constantly recurring need on the part of the Christian. The Christian at his very best on attaining to the highest pinnacle in the life of holiness in the world.

He is still a poor, frail, needy sinner in daily need of the grace and the power and the strength of God. This is a truth which the apostle surely was impressing on the Philippian believers when perhaps they were afraid that someday the well would run dry and they would have nothing.

[23 : 20] My God, he says, shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. After all, he has met my need. I have all things and abound.

I am full and so my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. In this state below, in the conflict, in the suffering, in the trial, he will supply the daily need of his people.

But in a state of glory, in a state triumphant, all their lack and all their want will be in the past. They shall hunger no more because the lamb who was in the midst of the throne shall feed them and shall lead them to living fountains of water.

And remember, as John says, these things, they are faithful and true. And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to show unto his servants the things which must shortly be done.

And so, my dear believing friend, what is your own calculation with regard to this matter? What is your reckoning? What is your estimate in regard to the word before us?

[24 : 49] How do you see things and how do you weigh things up as you look at life with his sorrows and his trials and his sufferings and his death? Are you seeing and are you relating your sufferings slowly to the sin of time and of sense?

If so, then you are certain to arrive at a completely imbalanced conclusion with regard to the purpose of God.

And so, miss a blessing for yourself. The sufferings of this present time, they are to be clearly related to the eternal sin.

and they are to be seen in the light of the glory that will one day be revealed and which the Christian, the believer, will participate.

And however great and however acute these sufferings may be, they are not to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

[25 : 56] Marcus Lone writing on these words says in one of his books, they are not worth considering in a comparison in which the two sides are so far of mutual proportion for how can the little affairs of time hope to balance the mighty facts of eternity.

glory. Then Paul's words not only make it clear that temporal affliction is no equivalent to the promised glory, they show that it will sink into total oblivion when the children of God enter into their great inheritance.

such calculation and comparison were based on the facts of his own experience and he was as sure of it all as if it could be proved by the ordinary rules of mathematics.

He was as much alive to the problems of pain as any man may be, but it was a logic of faith rather than a feeling which led him to form this judgment for I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

This was a ray of light for those who were enmeshed in the darkness of an age of persecution. They were partakers of his sufferings, but they rejoiced that they were to become partakers of the glory that shall be revealed.

[27 : 36] Such a hope, he says, has infused strength and comfort into the hearts of men like John Calvin in the face of grievous adversity. It was indeed with this verse on his lips, but in such pain that he could not finish the words, that he died with sure, uncertain hope of glory in the arms of Biza.

God, I reckon, says the man of God, by the spirit of God directing him, I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

May this be our view, my friends, may this be our perspective of life. May we in the strength of the grace of heaven go forward to whatever may be purposed for us in the wisdom and in the goodness of God, and may our reckoning be the reckoning of scripture with regard to whatever comes to pass, and may we be assured that his grace alone will be our sufficiency in every tribulation and in every moment of trial.

Amen, and may God add his blessing to our meditation in his words. Shall we pray? O Lord, our God, we pray thee to grant grace unto us in order to view life as we should and accept whatever providence thou dost send into our lives, that we may thereby glorify thee and enjoy thee forever.

O Lord, we are oftentimes mystified with life and with what life brings to us. We know not the answer to many things.

[29 : 46] We know not how to interpret many events. we are unable to give a real and accurate interpretation of these matters, but when this is the case, we pray that we may still be given grace to be still and to know that thou art God and that thou doest all things well.

According to the words that we have already read in this chapter, that all things work together for good to those who love thee and are called according to thy purpose.

O Lord, draw near to us, we beseech thee, and to all those who are especially near to us at this time, we pray that thy grace may be the sufficiency of each one of us, and that we may know the calm and the quiet and the fortitude of that grace in our soul's experience.

Bless us as we join together in singing our parting song. Watch over us during the day. Bring us out again in the evening to worship thee, and cleanse us, we beseech thee from all unrighteousness, in Jesus' name.

Amen.