

This vision of the glory of God, is true joy. Not shallow, or selfish, not weak or temporary, like so much so-called joy in the world, but true unending, unfading, unshakeable joy: a joy which will never grow cold, and of which you will never tire.

In the face of Jesus' suffering, he looked to the joy he knew awaited him in the glory of God.

In the face of Paul's suffering, he looked to the person of Jesus knowing that he too would share that joy, of and in God's glory.

We too, in the struggles and pains of our daily lives, look with expectation to the glorified Son of God, and in spite of everything we know that we have a hope, a certain assurance from God's Holy Spirit, that we are his children, that he loves us and that the joy of his glory awaits us.



TRINITY
BIBLE CLASS

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Reflections on Suffering

Romans 8:12-25 "Hope In Suffering"

Paul has been talking in the previous chapters of Romans about the free gift of God's grace in the person of Jesus Christ.

More specifically, Paul has been arguing that because of the life and death of Jesus on the cross, we, by being joined with Jesus in faith, are transferred, as it were, from a world dominated by the law, by sin and by death, into a world dominated by faith, by the Holy Spirit and by the hope of glory.

In the passage before us, Paul uses this greater hope to put the sufferings of life into a greater context.

Suffering is something, of course, with which we are well acquainted. The world is suffering, indeed the normal suffering of the world; natural disasters, poverty, wars, oppression and disease, have been hugely magnified by the terrible presence of the Corona virus.

The world is suffering, our country is suffering, those around us, family, friends and acquaintances are suffering.

Our village has been, by God's grace, relatively unscathed by this awful illness, and we can be immensely grateful to God for his kindness to us, although we must be aware, particularly those among us who are more vulnerable, that this is not over; the disease is still out there, there is still no cure, and treatment, though improving, does not guarantee anything. We have been warned only this week of the very real possibility of another, even more serious, wave of infection over the winter months.

But we have not been entirely free from suffering, nevertheless. Some in the areas around us have suffered terribly. One or two in our communities have been ill. Many people have found the strain of

isolation unbearable, the loss of family contact unendurable, and the limitation and constraint on normal life to be unacceptable. The suffering has been very real, and for the most part, we have endured it with God's good grace.

Paul was not unaware of the realities of suffering. Paul new real hardship, persecution, rejection and pain. We are reminded of the passage in 2 Corinthians 11, where Paul lists his sufferings: three times beaten with rods, on one occasion stoned and left for dead, shipwrecked three time, spending a night in the sea, living in constant danger, hungry, cold and exposed. Paul knew what it was to suffer.

I am pointing this out because so often when we look at the Bible, and reflect upon how we are encouraged to deal with suffering, there is a tendency to dismiss it as unrealistic, as if the Biblical authors were just academics who were writing about things they couldn't possibly understand. What could they possibly say that was relevant to real suffering, how could they who lived with their heads in the clouds possibly understand?

Paul certainly knew what real suffering was.

So how does Paul deal with suffering? How does he encourage us to deal with suffering?

Paul reminds the Christians in Rome that they have received a spirit, the Holy Spirit.

They received the Holy Spirit at the moment they put their true and wholehearted faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as their only and necessary saviour.

This Spirit, the one living within each true believer, is not, Paul tells us a spirit of slavery or of fear, it is rather the Holy Spirit of God, establishing new life in each one if us, and bearing witness deep in our hearts, that we truly are the children of God.

Paul is developing a greater context, a bigger picture in which to understand, and come to terms with, our suffering, our real, and sometimes seemingly unbearable suffering.

That we are God's children is a wonderful truth, we are in a special relationship of love and trust with God. But, as if that were not enough, being a child of God, means that, like Jesus, we are also heirs of God. We have an inheritance. We have a good estate on which to set our eyes. We have a grand reward to look forward to.

What is that reward? To what does Paul wanted us to direct our thoughts? To where does Paul want us to raise our eyes in expectation?

Because we are God's children, Paul tells us, because we are God's children, because we are united with Jesus in faith, we are also united with him in his future. What Jesus inherits, we inherit. What Jesus enjoys for all eternity, we enjoy for all eternity.

The great inheritance, the great reward, that which sustained Jesus in the days of his suffering was, we are told in Hebrews 12, the joy that was set before him. That joy was the knowledge that his death would save the souls of God's people and enable them to share with him the glory of God's presence.

When Jesus prays for the disciples at the last supper, he prays for those whom God had given him, to be with him, and to see the glory that God had given him (John17:24.) In seeing that glory, the glory of Jesus, those who follow Jesus will themselves be glorified.

Glory is a strange idea for us: conjuring up, perhaps ideas more akin to popularity, fame, or success. We talk sometimes of enjoying "reflected glory," as we those around us achieve great things.

While this is not entirely the kind of thing that Paul is talking about, there is a sense in which we enjoy Jesus' reflected glory, as he himself radiates the glory of God. In a Biblical sense glory has to do with the joy, peace and satisfaction obtained by being close to God to seeing something of his person, his majesty and his holiness.