

The Way Up Is Down

Romans 8: 16 – 17

- As we saw last week, here in Romans 8: 16 – 17, Paul talks about suffering and glory, and those two words are the two best words to describe Jesus' life during that week between Palm Sunday and Resurrection Sunday.
 - In fact, if you think about Jesus' week it actually went like this. Glory to unimaginable suffering to greater glory all in a week's time. In one week, Jesus went from being hailed as a king, to being crucified as a criminal, to being exalted as the King of kings and Lord of lords. That's quite a week.
 - On Palm Sunday, Jesus rode into Jerusalem to cheering crowds. Who wouldn't be cheering for him? After all he just raised Lazarus from the dead, and if he could do that, then surely, he could lead the Israelites in expelling the Roman Empire from their land. But there was something very different about the way that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on that Palm Sunday.
 - In the Ancient Near East, a king entered cities riding on a warhorse in order to convey his military power, particularly when he was entering into newly conquered cities where his rule may have been regarded as illegitimate or met with suspicion or outright rejection. The exception to this custom was when a beloved king entered his own capital city. There he would ride in on a donkey, as a benevolent king.
 - In our earlier responsive reading from Zechariah 9: 9 we heard the prophet Zechariah speak of a day when Jerusalem would see her victorious king return—riding on a donkey to bring good to his people.
 - On Palm Sunday, Jesus rode into Jerusalem to conquer. But it wasn't on a war horse, and it wasn't to conquer the Romans.
 - It was a different enemy that Jesus came to conquer once and for all, to bring good to his people by securing a lasting salvation and establishing a new reign of peace for all. This hope of the true king, riding on a donkey, led the crowd to shout: "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"
 - The people knew exactly what it meant that Jesus was riding into town on a donkey. This was their king who was coming to work good on their behalf, and on Palm Sunday, they hailed him as such.
 - Son of David was an acknowledgement by the crowds that Jesus was the Messiah—the king from David's family. Hosanna means "Save! Please!"
 - And yet this crowd soon became the angry mob that cried for blood. Five days later they were shouting "Crucify Him!" And they did, and three days later Jesus rose from the grave as the conquering King of kings completely defeating Satan, sin, and death.
- Think what the Apostle Paul tells us about Jesus in Philippians 2.

Philippians 2: 6 though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped

- Jesus was God. He had real glory, eternal glory. But he willingly emptied himself, of all that was his in heaven, and took the nature of a servant.

Philippians 2: 7 – 8 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant,⁷ being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

- Think of what happened with Jesus as God took on flesh. Think what mankind did to God the moment God had flesh and we could get our hands on him. We caused him to suffer and die. We literally murdered God the first chance we got. But because Jesus was willing to humble himself, enduring from sinners such hostility against himself, to die for those who caused his suffering, God exalted him, and crowned him with an even greater glory.

Philippians 2: 9 – 10 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

- So, in these verses, what is the pattern we see with Jesus? It is the pattern that we already saw play out in that week between Palm Sunday and resurrection Sunday. From glory to humility and suffering, to greater glory.
 - That is the pattern. It is the pattern of the Gospel. It's the upside-down pattern of the Kingdom of Heaven. The way up to glory is down in humility. The way to becoming royalty is, first, to become a servant.
 - Paul wrote what he wrote, about Jesus, in Philippians 2, to show us that this pattern is the pattern that we are to follow in our lives. Listen to how Paul starts those verses about Jesus.

Philippians 2: 6 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus

- This is how we are to think. The pattern of Jesus in Philippians 2 is the pattern for our lives. The way up is down. Suffering Precedes Glory!
 - This is the pattern of our sonship; a pattern that exactly follows the pattern of Christ's Sonship.

Romans 8: 16 – 17 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 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.

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.

- Suffering and glory. We are joint heirs with Christ to both. Paul is actually telling us here that the assurance of our salvation, of our glorification, is suffering.
 - That is not how we think is it? We often think if God loves me then good things should happen to me. Sure, maybe a little suffering to get me on the right path, but once I am on the path, I ought to be able to get to the mountaintop without any hard climbing.



- But that is not how this works, and Jesus never gave the slightest inclination that that is how this works.

John 16: 33 In the world you will have tribulation.

- That is a promise of Jesus, but it is not a promise we often claim, is it?

Luke 9:23 And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

- The cross was an instrument of torture and death. Jesus isn’t giving us a way to avoid suffering, he is calling us to enter into suffering with him.

1. The parentage of suffering

- Where did suffering come from? What is its origin?
 - If God made everything good, then why is there suffering? Some people say there is no God, at least not the God of the Bible because there is suffering.
- As we know from Genesis 3, sin cursed man and creation. Because of sin, life is hard. Creation now rebels against our rule. There are droughts which cause famines, and floods and storms that cause destruction. There is disease and death. So, we see some of our suffering comes as a result of the curse of sin.
 - It doesn’t matter how good or bad we are, we will all suffer. Jesus was the best. He was goodness personified and yet he suffered like no one else ever has. Why would we ever think that just being good would ever cause us to escape suffering?
- But even sin itself often brings suffering. Think of the suffering that comes from a broken relationship. What is it that caused the broken relationship? Sin—usually pride and selfishness. Those of you who endured a divorce, or a broken relationship with a parent, child, relative, or friend know how painful this kind of suffering can be.
- Sometimes the consequences of our sin brings suffering to our lives and the lives of others. A child disobeys their parent and is grounded. A man drinks too much and then gets behind the wheel and injures someone else bringing suffering not just to the injured party, but to the driver and to the loved ones of both. A woman desires to get ahead so she compromises her virtue and lives in guilt and shame.
- But sin also brings suffering to us in another more hidden way. Mankind was created to have glory—to be the pinnacle of God’s creation, rulers over God’s creation. But instead of being humble servants of our creator, in pride we rebelled and tried to usurp God’s authority.
 - Eve took the fruit because Satan convinced her that if she ate it, she would become like God, and would no longer be dependent on God.
 - In doing that, we lost the glory that was ours. We were created in the image of God, but now the image was marred. We were made to rule and reign over creation, but now creation rebels against our rule. We lost glory, and that loss of glory created an emptiness inside of us.



- That emptiness in us is part of the answer to the origin of suffering.
 - The Hebrew word for glory is the word “kabode” and literally means heavy or weighty. When we speak of God’s glory, we are saying that God is weightier or heavier than anything else. When mankind fell in the Garden, we lost the weightiness that God created us to have, and we feel that loss, and spend our lives looking for way to fill the emptiness and get the glory back.
 - This the cause of much of our suffering, we want things to fill the emptiness in our life and when we can’t have those things, we feel like we are suffering. Many times, when we feel like we are suffering it is because we do not have something, health, finances, success, power, relationships, that we think we need to have in order to be complete, fulfilled, and happy.
- This quest to fill the emptiness in our lives can also spill over and effect the lives of others. Why are people oppressed? Because someone is hungering for power to fill the emptiness that only God can truly fill.
- And that brings us to one more form of suffering that comes as a result of sin. It is a form of suffering that comes only to Christians. It is persecution. Jesus said:

John 15: 18 “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you

- Persecution for the sake of Christ is peculiar to Christians. Paul knew this kind of suffering well.

2 Corinthians 11: 24 – 25 Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. ²⁵Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea.

- Because of sin, we all suffer, but some especially suffer simply because they desire to love and serve Jesus. And this kind of suffering that can particularly raise questions in people’s minds.
 - Why would God allow those who love Jesus to be persecuted? If God loves His people, why do they suffer?

2. The problem of suffering

- For centuries philosophers have used to suffering to undermine the character and existence of God. Saying things like, “If there is a God, who is loving and powerful, then why is there suffering? Why doesn’t He do something about it? Is there no God? Is God not loving? Is God not powerful?”
- Those questions have a very short-term view of suffering, don’t they? If you take a longer-term view, you can see that in His love and power, God has indeed done something about suffering. That is what Easter week is all about.
 - In love and power, Jesus, clothed himself in the weakness of our flesh, and came and suffered oppression and persecution at the hands of sinful men.

Acts 2: 22 – 23 “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— ²³this Jesus, delivered up according to the

definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

- Why did Jesus do that? Why did he come in such weakness? To bear our sin.

1 Peter 2: 24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

- And as Jesus went as low as a person could possibly go, not just suffering and dying, but by being completely cut off and forsaken by the Father, and then raised to new life, the curse of sin was broken, and Satan, sin, and death were defeated.

1 Corinthians 15: 54 – 57 “Death is swallowed up in victory.” ⁵⁵ “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” ⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

- This is hard but true. If a person is a Christian, all suffering is good, because at the cross, Christ transformed our suffering into something glorious.

“That is what mortals misunderstand. They say of some temporal suffering, “No future bliss can make up for it” not knowing that Heaven, once attained, will work backwards, and turn even that agony into a glory.” C. S. Lewis *The Great Divorce*

- That’s power. That’s love. In the end suffering will prove that there indeed is a God who is good, loving, and powerful. At the cross, in great love and in great power, God took what Satan intended for evil and turned it to our ultimate good.

3. The power of suffering

- Last week we talked about how God uses our suffering to both confirm and conform. Our suffering confirms that we are God’s children, because God allows discipline to come to those He loves, and God also uses our suffering to conform us more and more to the image of His son. The power of suffering purifies us, and the power of suffering proves our faith through perseverance.
- How does suffering purify us?

“Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” — C.S. Lewis

- God uses our suffering to get our attention. Maybe it is as simple as allowing the consequences of sin to linger on in our lives, so we learn to no longer engage in whatever the sinful activity is. He allows the consequences of our sin to remain as a deterrent to us continuing to live in that sin.

1 Peter 4: 12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

- Peter’s use of the phrase fiery trial draws on how a goldsmith would refine gold or silver. They would use a fire to heat the metal to a molten state. As they did this the precious metal would sink downward and impurities, called dross, would float upward, which allowed the goldsmith to skim them off leaving only pure metal.

- The way a goldsmith knew that the refining process was complete was when he could see his face reflected in the molten metal. This is how God uses suffering in our lives to refine us. The fiery trials we go through separate out sinful attitudes and tendencies, so they can be put aside. As that happens, we more and more reflect the image of Jesus in our lives.
 - Now as you think about that, I want you to notice that it really doesn't matter what the source of our suffering is. God uses every bit of it to purify us. He certainly uses things that come into our lives as the result of the curse of sin to purify us. Things like persecution, oppression, broken relationships, and illness.
 - But He also uses our sin and the consequences of our sin to refine us. As I have told you many times, for years success was my God, and I kept trying to grab hold of it for all I was worth, but each time I thought I was about to grab hold of success, God broke my fingers and made me let go.
 - It hurt terribly every time He did it. But what a mercy it was for God to do that. Success was my idol, if God had let me to lay hold of success, I wouldn't be here today. I'd be pattering along a beach somewhere, very full of myself, but very empty and weightless on the inside.
 - The pain of having those fingers broken so many times, reminds me daily that the only success worth having is the success of having Jesus say, "Well done good and faithful servant." I don't know if I'll ever hear those words, because I have spiritual A.D.D. and like a dog I keep trying to return to the vomit of my own successes. But my fingers have been broken so many times that it is really hard for me to hold onto anything, and that is actually a good place for me to be, because it means that I have to keep trusting Jesus to hold onto me.
- God often uses our suffering to strip away everything else that we are trusting in to give us comfort and happiness, so that we see our need to rely on Christ alone for those things. It's painful and hard, but it is good.
 - This is why Peter, Paul, and James all say that we should rejoice in trials.

Romans 5: 3 – 5 Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.

- Suffering is God's way of purifying or refining our lives to conform to the image of Jesus. We should rejoice that God is at work doing this.
- Look what Paul says there in Romans 5: 3, "Suffering produces endurance or, if you will, perseverance.
 - Think about Job. Why did Satan say that Job worshipped God?

Job 1: 9 - 11 "Does Job fear God for no reason? ¹⁰Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. ¹¹But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face."

- To prove Satan wrong God allowed suffering to come into Job's life. As you read the rest of the book of Job, Job struggled mightily to persevere in faith. But he did. And what was the result?
 - Job was changed. He was humbled through the process.
 - Persevering in suffering proved Job's faith to be genuine.
 - ✓ Continuing to cling to God when everything is falling apart, you prove that you love and trust God just for who He is.
 - ✓ Persevering in faith, during suffering that comes as a result of anything, even sin, is the greatest evidence you can have that you are a true child of God, an heir of God, and a fellow heir with Christ. Because you are holding onto God and continuing to love God when there is seemingly no logical reason to.
 - ✓ Notice I said even sin. There is no greater assurance of faith that we can have than that when we sin, rather than running and hiding, we keep coming back to Jesus for forgiveness and cleansing. Why would we do that if we aren't really trusting him? The greatest proof that you are trusting Jesus isn't that you are good person. There are a lot of good people who aren't trusting Jesus. It is that when you sin you run to Jesus.
- Why would a person continue to trust Jesus as Lord of their life, when they are suffering? Because they know and live in the assurance that:

2 Corinthians 4: 17 this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,

- That's faith—faith that glorifies God.
- Think of that, through Job's perseverance, in the face of suffering, God was glorified, and Satan disgraced. What an awesome thing for a human being to be able to do! This is what we are made to do. Glorify God and disgrace Satan in the process.

4. The poison to suffering

- The problem is that too often we poison the process of our suffering by short circuiting it.
- How do we short circuit the process? Three ways: anger, avoidance, and apathy.
 - Sometimes, in anger, we blame or even curse God for our suffering, and rather than drawing near to God in the suffering and allowing Him to work, we push God away.
 - But sometimes rather than anger poisoning the process of suffering avoidance does. Here's one I think we all fall into. Think how much time and effort we spend praying that God will simply take problems away, rather than praying that God would work through the suffering to accomplish His purpose in it. Or maybe we try to avoid suffering by filling our life with things to try to numb the suffering.

- The only way suffering can accomplish God’s purpose in purifying us and proving our faith to be genuine is if we embrace it and engage with it allowing God to work through it.
- It’s not wrong to pray and ask God to relieve suffering, but even more important we should pray and ask God to work through the suffering to accomplish His purpose. That is real faith, isn’t it? It’s like trusting the surgeon enough to cut you open.
- And that brings me to the last a that can poison the process of suffering—apathy. “Whatever. It doesn’t matter. It is what it is. I’ll just grit my teeth and bare it.”
 - Yes, it is what it is. And it is all part of God’s purpose, and if we dismiss it, make light of it, or trivialize it we will short circuit its work in our lives.

5. The proper process of suffering

Romans 8: 17 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

- We have already seen just a glimpse of the glory that will be revealed to us in this week’s study. What could be more glorious than taking on more and more of the image of Jesus, as suffering purifies the dross from our life? What could be more glorious than one day hearing Jesus say, “Well done good and faithful servant?” What could be more glorious than being part of disgracing Satan, as we endure through suffering running with perseverance the race marked out for us?
- In the Greek, that word consider is an accounting word. On one side of the ledger is the pain of suffering and other side is the glory that is to be revealed to us. And what is Paul saying to us? There is no comparison. The ledger is completely out of balance. Sometimes feels like suffering outweighs the glory. But it is not true, and we have to stop and take an accounting of the true state of things.

2 Corinthians 4: 16 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

- This Easter week proves that suffering precedes glory, that the way up is down. Jesus meant what he said we really need to follow him.
- Jesus had indeed taken a proper accounting of everything. The sufferings of the cross, which accomplished our salvation was nothing compared to the eternal weight of glory of being given a name that is above every name.

Hebrews 12: 2 Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

- The way up is down. Like Jesus let us rejoice in suffering knowing that the light and momentary affliction of our suffering today pales in comparison to the eternal weight of glory that is ours through what Christ has accomplished for us at the cross.