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## PRACTICING THE RESURRECTION | SUFFERING AND GLORY

May 11, 2025

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I've been reminding you that Easter is not merely a day, but like Christmas, it's an entire season. So during this Easter season, we are considering how we might "practice the resurrection," to borrow a phrase from the poet Wendell Berry. In other words, our aim is to better understand the resurrection of Jesus and its practical, everyday implications for our lives. And if that's the goal, then there's no better place for us to turn than Romans 8, which forms the heart and the center of Paul's greatest letter. So over this several-week series, we're taking a deep dive into Romans 8, drawing inspiration from N.T. Wright's relatively recent book "Into the Heart of Romans." I began this series, and N.T. Wright himself will be back on June 1 to bring this little series to a conclusion.

We began by discussing the fact that there is not now, nor will there ever be, any condemnation for those who belong to Jesus — because of Jesus' death on our behalf, and because of the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit. And then we went on last week to consider our promised future inheritance. God has promised not only to adopt us as his sons and daughters but to make us heirs — heirs of God, co-heirs with Christ, but heirs of what? And we said that our inheritance is the promise of the New Creation. And now today, I'd like us to take up the themes of suffering and glory.

Glory is one of those words that shows up again and again and again in the Scriptures. And sometimes people would sum up the whole story of salvation by saying that God's goal is to take us from grace to glory. No glory is a rich, beautiful, powerful word, but if someone asked you, "Well, what exactly does glory mean, and what does it mean to be glorified?" my guess is that most of us would probably be stumped. And part of the reason why is because it is such a beautiful, multi-layered word that is just chock-full of significance. So during our time together this morning, I'd like us to see what we can learn about glory by asking three questions: 1) *What is it?* 2) *Why do we need it?* 3) *What difference does it make?*

<sup>17</sup>And if [we're] 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.

<sup>18</sup>For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup>For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup>For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup>that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

*Romans 8:17-21*

## What Is It?

So first, what is glory? People often have mistakenly interpreted the word glory to simply mean heaven. When someone dies, people might say, “They have been taken into glory,” or “They’ve gone to glory.” Or we might say, “We’ll see them again in glory.” But I don’t actually think that that’s how Paul is using the word. This is the preeminent chapter in the Bible on glory, and the word “heaven” doesn’t appear here ever in Romans 8. So what exactly does Paul mean by glory?

Let me give you three different aspects of glory to think about. C.S. Lewis was a professor, not a pastor, so he didn’t often deliver sermons in churches, but he did once. On June 8, 1941, he gave a sermon at a church in Oxford entitled “The Weight of Glory.” He took his title from 2 Corinthians 4, which has a lot of resonance with Romans 8. And there Paul writes, “This light, momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.” Now in this one sermon, C.S. Lewis directs us to these three different aspects of glory: 1) *Weight*, 2) *Fame*, and 3) (what he calls) *Luminosity*.

### Weight

First of all, what does he mean by weight? It might seem odd at first. Why does Paul refer to a weight of glory? The reason is because the word “glory” in Hebrew is the Hebrew word *kabod*, which literally means “weight” or “heavy.” So *kabod* is referring to something that is heavy or weighty in the sense of something that is significant or valuable. We might think of the weighty, powerful words of a speech, or we might think of the weighty role or position that a person assumes. So perhaps the closest synonym in English for “weight” might be “matter,” because the word “matter” denotes something of weight, something of mass, but at the same time “matter” refers to something that is significant or valuable. And in fact, we might even use the word in that sense. We might say a person of substance is a person who matters. And therefore, when we apply this word “weight” or “glory” to God, what we’re speaking of is God’s weighty presence. You could think of God’s glory as his majesty, his power, his rule, his weighty presence, his weighty position as the true King of the universe.

### Fame

How about this second aspect, fame? See, in this little sermon, C.S. Lewis goes on to speak of these two other ideas that are associated with glory, but the one seems wrong to him because it connotes something competitive, and the other one just seems a little silly and strange. So in the sermon “The Weight of Glory,” he says:

Glory suggests two ideas to me, of which one seems wicked and the other ridiculous. Either glory means to me fame, or it means luminosity. As for the first, since to be famous means to be better known than other people, the desire for fame appears to me as a competitive passion and therefore of hell rather than heaven. As for the second, who wishes to become a kind of living electric light bulb?

So what do we mean by these terms fame and luminosity? Well, let’s take this second aspect of glory, fame, first.

When we speak of fame, this aspect of glory has to do with praise. We could think of honor or renown, and especially in the ancient world, this is what a lot of people were living for. They wanted to achieve glory. They wanted to be remembered for their great deeds in this life, especially through something like military victory. But then when it comes to God, well, does God want to be famous? He certainly wants to be known. He wants to make his name known to the ends of the earth. But he doesn't want to be famous for conquering his subjects. No, what does God want to be famous for? He wants to be famous for being gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. See, that's what he wants us to know about him.

So when we're told to give God glory, it's not because God suffers from low self-esteem. It's not because God needs us to prop up his ego. No, when he asks us to simply give glory to him, it means that he wants us to recognize him for who he is; to acknowledge the beauty of his majesty, his rule, and his power; to give him the service of our lives; and to join him in making his name famous, making him known to the ends of the earth for who he really is. So to give God glory means to praise him, to recognize him for his superior worth, to give him his due, to acknowledge him for who he really is.

### **Luminosity**

But the third aspect of glory is perhaps the most strange. It's true that glory, especially in the Scriptures, is associated with light, with brightness, with splendor, with radiance. Whenever God's glory appears, it's accompanied by a bright light. Now we might make the mistake of thinking that the bright light is itself the glory. But the bright light is simply telling us about the glory. One theologian, therefore, once defined God's glory as simply the outward shining of God's inward beauty. His glory simply is the outward shining, the outward sparkle of his inward beauty.

Just think about how the glory of God appears in the Scriptures. We're told that the glory of God dwelt on Mount Sinai after the Exodus. And then God led his people through their wilderness wanderings in the form of a pillar of cloud and fire — a bright light of beautiful intensity and radiance. That same glory cloud filled the tabernacle in the wilderness. That same cloud of glory filled the temple in Jerusalem. And that same glory lit up the night sky when? On the night that the angels announced the birth of Jesus. And Hebrews 1 tells us that Jesus himself is the radiance of the glory of God. He's the outward shining, the visible expression of God's inward beauty.

Now the prophets, like in Habakkuk 2:14, tell us that one day the whole Earth is going to be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea. And N.T. Wright is fond of asking his students, well, how exactly do the waters cover the sea? The waters are the sea. And so what are the prophets telling us? They're telling us that one day the whole Earth is going to be filled with the radiant glory of God, meaning the whole world will be flooded with the knowledge of the glory of God. But that doesn't suggest that the whole planet is going to start to glow as if it were illuminated by some kind of electric light bulb. Rather the beauty of God's creative power and wisdom and love is going to shine all around. It'll be unmistakable. It'll shine all around for everyone, everywhere to see.

So we take these three aspects — weight, fame, luminosity — and when you put them all together, what do you get? Well, what this word “glory” is telling us is that God is the most weighty, the most significant, the most valuable, the most praiseworthy, the most beautiful being in the whole universe. And he wants to make himself known so that we might enjoy him for who he really is and find our true identity in and through him. So his glory is not just one attribute among many, but rather his glory is the infinitely superior worth of all of his attributes combined. And if you want to sum it up, you could sum it up like this: God’s glory is the beauty of his majesty, his power, and his rule as the world’s true King.

But here’s what’s so amazing. In verse 17, God promises not only that he’ll forgive our sin and adopt us as his sons and daughters; not only that he will make us heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ of our inheritance, the New Creation; but he promises that he will share his glory with us. He will share his majesty, his power, his rule with us. “And if [we’re] 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.” Now that is simply staggering if you stop and think about it.

### **Why Do We Need It?**

That brings me, then, to my second point. If that is what God’s glory is, then why do we need it? Notice that Paul lays out the promise of glory against the backdrop of suffering, and that’s why we need it. We need his glory because of the reality of suffering. He says in verse 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.” And then you put that together with 2 Corinthians 4, “This light, momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.” So what is Paul telling us?

Well, imagine that you have one of those old fashioned balance scales that suspend two trays over a fulcrum. And Paul is imagining that let’s say you could place all of the weight of that future glory that God has promised on one side of the scale, and then on the other you could place all the suffering of all the world since time began. Imagine that you could do that. And then Paul has the audacity to say that if somehow you are able to place them both on the scales — our future glory and all of our present suffering — that future glory is so heavy, so weighty, so significant, so valuable that it would make all of our suffering in this life — all of it combined — seem as if nothing in comparison. It would just be like fluff. It wouldn’t even tip the scale. It would just float into thin air as if it were nothing at all.

Now, how can Paul say that? Think about your life. Think about all the worst things that have ever happened to you in life. Now, as a pastor, I consider it an honor and a privilege that many of you share your stories with me. And it is, it’s an honor and it’s a privilege for people to open up to another person and to share with them not only all their joys but all their sorrows. And many of you have shared some of the most terrible, some of the most traumatic things that have ever happened to you. Even so, I still only know a fraction of the pain that you’ve endured. And yet, even though I only know in part, I know how much it hurts. Paul is saying even so, somehow, some way, if we were able to put all that pain and sorrow and suffering in the scales, it wouldn’t

even compare. It wouldn't even compare to the future glory that God has promised. This is an astounding, astounding promise.

But that's not all, because Paul's not just talking about the horrible things that happened to you and me; he's also talking about the horrible things that happen to the whole created order. Starting in verse 19 he says, "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God." He's personifying the created order. "For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God."

Do you see what he's doing here? He's showing us that the suffering and glory of God's children are integrally related to the suffering and glory of God's creation. And notice that Paul's not using the word "nature" here. He's not talking about mother nature. He's not talking about nature as if it has some independent existence apart from God. No, he calls it "creation." Creation. The created order is the product of his heart, of his mind, and of his love. And he is telling us here that God's creation shares not only in our suffering and in our pain, but creation even shares in our future glory. Creation was subjected to futility — not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope.

So what is Paul talking about here? Well, very clearly this is an allusion back to Genesis 3 when human beings rebelled against God. It wasn't just human beings, but it was the whole creation that was subjected to a curse. God says to the man, he says to the Adam in Genesis 3:17, "Cursed it is the ground because of you." And from now on, he says, the created order is going to produce thorns and thistles rather than fruits and vegetables. And from that point forward, human beings are only going to be able to extract food from the ground by the sweat of their brow and through painful toil. Now the land, the ground, the creation itself will be a source of futility and frustration.

So Paul doesn't go into all the details here, but he sums up the entirety of that curse with that one word, "futility." Everything has been subjected to futility, to emptiness, to vanity, to frustration, to seeming meaninglessness. And if you were here back in the winter, you may recall that the whole book of Ecclesiastes is essentially a commentary on that one word, "futility." The professor of Ecclesiastes is trying to examine, trying to explore the apparent meaninglessness, vanity, emptiness, futility, and frustration of life within this fallen world because of the curse. But notice that Paul says that the creation was subjected to futility *not willingly* but because of the one who subjected it *in hope*. Now who could Paul possibly be talking about who has the ability to subject it to futility and yet do so in hope? Well, only the Lord. He's talking about God. God is the only one who can simultaneously be Lord, Judge, and Savior.

So what Paul's telling us is that though the created order itself was subjected to this curse of futility, one day God has promised to set it free — to set it free from its bondage to corruption. And he's going to liberate the whole created order in both a negative sense and a positive sense. See negatively people often say this. They'll say, "Well, the world is just falling apart. It's winding down. It's succumbing to the forces of entropy." Our scientists will tell us, "Well the world began with a big bang, and it's



probably gonna come to an end with either a big chill or a big crunch,” meaning that the universe will either eventually slowly become colder and colder as it expands indefinitely into that vast, infinite, cold space, or it’s going to collapse in on itself and end in a big crunch.

But Paul says nuh uh. No way. Because the Creator God has made a promise that he’s going to set this world free from its bondage to corruption. He’s going to set the created order free from this seemingly unending cycle of decline, decay, and death. But then on the positive side, Paul also says that the creation will be set free to obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. Or perhaps we could better translate that as the created order will enjoy the freedom that comes when God’s children are glorified. Now, stop and think about this. This is amazing. Paul’s not saying creation will enjoy the freedom that comes when *God* is glorified. No, creation will enjoy the freedom that comes when *we* are glorified.

So what do we get when we put all these ideas together? Well, if you go back to those opening chapters of Genesis, what are we told? We’re told that our original vocation, the vocation that God gave human beings, was to be his image bearers who exercised wise, responsible stewardship over the created order. He places a man and a woman in a garden to work it and to keep it. And what we’re being told then is that the original creation was always intended to become more than what it was at the beginning. The original creation was just the beginning. It was just the start. It was meant to grow into something even greater, something even more beautiful. And the only way that that was going to happen was through the responsible stewardship of human beings.

But now that human beings have rebelled against God — turned our backs on him — that plan to make something even more out of the original creation was thwarted. The plan was frustrated. The plan became futile — not because of God, and not because of the creation, but because of us! And so now the creation itself is breathlessly waiting. Subhuman, inanimate creation is breathlessly waiting for glory, because then and only then will the created order itself become all that God had originally intended. This world is just the beginning. God has destined it for so much more.

### **What Difference Does It Make?**

So if that’s what glory is, and if that’s why we need it — because of the problem of suffering and because of the futility of the curse — then we have to ask the “so what” question: So what? What difference does all of this make?

Well, verse 19 is the key verse. “For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God” or for the children of God. Now that expression, “eager longing,” suggests someone straining their head forward in order to see. It pictures someone standing on tiptoe, scanning the horizon, just waiting to see what’s going to come around the corner. And Paul’s telling us that all of creation, from the top of Mount Everest to the depth of the Pacific Ocean, is dying to see something. What is all of creation dying to see? It’s dying to see the revelation of the glorified children of God.

Now this is truly astounding to me. We would think that all of creation would be waiting for the unveiling of the risen and reigning Christ. But no, it's waiting for the revelation of us — the unveiling of us as God's glorified children. Look at verse 18. You would expect that the glory would be revealed *to* us, as verse 18 is written. But actually it's not a good translation. Because what Paul really says here is that this glory is going to be revealed *for* us — or even better, that glory is going to be revealed *upon* us. See, what Paul is saying here is that when Jesus returns to usher in the New Creation and to make all things new, he's not going to just raise us up with new physical bodies to enjoy life with him in a new physical world. It's as if he's going to clothe us in the royal robes of Jesus. It's as if he's going to invest us with his own glorious majesty, rule, and reign.

And that's why Paul can hardly believe it, because he's saying that God's creation is now standing on tiptoe, not only because God is going to *reveal* his glory, but because God is going to *share* his glory with us. He's going to clothe us. He's going to invest us with his own glory, because he's going to share his reign and rule over the new creation with us. Because that was always God's plan. And so why is creation just waiting for that moment when we are revealed as the glorified children of God? Because that will be the sign. That will be the sign that now creation itself finally will be set free from its own bondage to corruption to become everything that God had ever intended it to be.

You see, this really is what the New Testament is all about. Do you realize that Jesus spoke of the recreation of the world — in Greek it's *palingenesia*, *palin genesis*, recreation. He's going to bring about a rebirth. The Apostle Peter talked about the restoration of all things. Elsewhere Paul talks about the reconciliation of all things in heaven and on earth. And the Apostle John envisioned a new heaven and a new earth where God will finally come and dwell in the midst of his people. And on that day, God will personally wipe the tears from our eyes and there will be no more death, no more mourning, no more crying, no more pain, because Jesus has made all things new. So creation is waiting for God to share his glory with us — to share the majesty of his rule and reign with us so that now, finally, we can fulfill that original vocation to be the responsible, wise stewards of God's renewed cosmos so that it might become everything that God had ever destined for this creation to become.

So if we take a look at all these pieces and put them together, you can see now how this puzzle fits together. And what it shows us is that this is not an either/or; it's a both/and. In other words, we don't have to choose between what we might call "divine glory" and the promise of "human glory." Because on the one hand, yes, the words of the prophets will be fulfilled. God will flood the whole earth with the knowledge of his glory. But that's not all. Not only will he make his infinitely superior worth known to the ends of the earth, but he's going to share his glory with us, his image bearers. So it's not just that God will forgive our sin or adopt us into his family as his sons and daughters and make us heirs of this New Creation. It's not just that he'll raise us up with new physical bodies in a new physical world, but he's going to share his rule with us. He has reserved a crown and a throne for us, so that together with him we might join him in his work of faithfully tending to and caring for a whole renewed cosmos — the New Creation.

We began our service today with a Call to Worship from Psalm 8, and on the one hand, it's talking about us as human beings. Who are we when we consider the stars that God has made? When we consider the massive size of the universe? Who are we that God

even gives any thought to us? But yet ultimately, Psalm 8 is about Jesus. Because Jesus is the one who, at least for a little while, was subjected a little lower than the heavenly beings, but now he is crowned with glory and honor through his resurrection and his ascension to the right hand of the Father. Right now, Jesus is reigning and ruling over all things. All things have been put under his feet.

But the wonder of wonders is that Jesus crowns *us* with glory and honor, too. And that's why C.S. Lewis gets this absolutely right when he ends his children's story, "The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe." The great lion, Aslan, who is the Christ figure, gives the four children — Peter and Edmond, Susan and Lucy — crowns. He crowns them. And then he leads them to the thrones that were reserved for the sons of Adam and the daughters of Eve.

And this is what God has promised us: that he will share his crown, he will share his throne with us so that we might join him in his rule over the New Creation, just as these four children join Aslan in his reign over Narnia. And C.S. Lewis certainly had Romans 8 in mind when he wrote that final chapter, because he says if these children ever remembered their life in this world, it was only as one remembers a dream. You see, a dream is something that we remember, but no matter what's in our dream, it can't ever hurt us because it belongs to another world. "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." If we remember this life, it'll be only as one remembers a dream.

So that's what glory is, that's why we need it, and that's the difference that it makes. And so as we conclude, very quickly let me just suggest some implications about what this means: 1) *for our world*, 2) *for ourselves*, and 3) *for our suffering*.

### **For Our World**

You know, there are some people, there are some Christians who really don't care about this world at all because they say, "Well who cares? It's all gonna burn." And while it's true that God may purify this world by fire, he's not going to destroy this world by fire. God's goal is not to remove us from this world but to renew this world — to usher in a renewed cosmos. Martin Luther was once asked, "If you knew that Jesus was going to come back tomorrow — if he was going to bring the whole story of human history to a close tomorrow — what would you do today?" And do you know what he said? He said he would plant a tree. And that's exactly right. God's not getting rid of this world. No, through us he's going to make it all that he had always imagined. And therefore, we're called to anticipate that future world through our words and our actions now. We have to start caring for our creation, because we've always been called to be its stewards.

### **For Ourselves**

Secondly, what does this tell us about ourselves? Well, I think our biggest problem as human beings is that we suffer from a failure of imagination. Look at what we're studying. We have no idea what God has in store for us. As Paul says in his Corinthian correspondence, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him."

Elsewhere, C.S. Lewis said this:



If we let Him...He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into...a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly (though, of course, on a smaller scale) His own boundless power and delight and goodness. The process will be long and in parts very painful; but that is what we are in for. Nothing less.

“The process will be long and in parts very painful; but that is what we are in for. Nothing less.” And that tells us a little something about our sufferings. We’re not asked to forget our sufferings in light of this future glory, but rather to put them in perspective.

Do you realize that after his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples, and one of the first things he did was show them the scars. He showed them the scars of where he had been nailed and where he had been pierced. Think of the power of that. The disciples were convinced that those nails ruined Jesus’ life, and those nails ruined their lives too. But by showing his scars, Jesus says, no, no, no, those nails didn’t ruin your life; those nails saved your life. And so now, in light of the resurrection, we’re not being asked to forget our suffering, but the resurrection actually includes our suffering, it explains our suffering, and it redeems our suffering.

And so if you are experiencing pain now, Jesus is not asking us to try to minimize our suffering but rather to meditate on the future glory — to see that as hard, as real, as painful as it is, it’s nothing in comparison to what he has in store for us. Can you imagine? See as for Jesus, so for us, suffering is just the prelude to glory. That’s why George MacDonald said, “The Son of God suffered unto the death, not that men might not suffer, but that their sufferings might be like His.” And there’s nothing better than that. That is the promise of glory.

*Let me pray for us.*

*Father, we pray that you would help us to consider that you are the most weighty, the most significant, the most valuable, the most praiseworthy, the most beautiful Being in the universe. And though we can hardly believe it, the promise of promises, the wonder of wonders is that you are not only going to reveal your glory and make all things new, you’re going to share your glory with us. We know we don’t deserve it. Help us to live in light of that promise, that we will join you in your wise, loving rule over a whole renewed cosmos. We ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.*