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## PRACTICING THE RESURRECTION | SUFFERING AND GLORY (33)

May 11, 2025

Romans 8:17-21

### PURPOSE

To discover and experience Jesus Christ in our midst  
To cultivate mutually encouraging relationships  
To participate in God's mission to the world

### PLEASE OPEN IN PRAYER

### INTRODUCTION

We're in a sermon series on Romans 8, inspired by N. T. Wright's book "Into the Heart of Romans." We've already seen how this chapter offers tremendous assurance to the Roman believers ("therefore there is now no condemnation," 8:1), and how Christians are not only adopted as sons but also as co-heirs with Christ (8:17). In today's passage Paul connects suffering with glory and explains that just as Christ suffered and entered into glory, we too have a glory that is going to be revealed to us after the present sufferings (8:18). The Apostle goes on to explain that through the Fall of Adam, all of creation was subject to futility, and now the cosmos is eagerly awaiting the glorification of God's children (8:20-21). We will see that Paul uses the word "glorification" not to talk about our individual salvation or going to heaven, but in referring to the redemption and renewal of the whole creation, to which we are "called" (as vocation) as God's children and his image-bearers. We're in a sermon series on Romans 8 called *Practicing the Resurrection*, and this week we'll look at the topic of "Suffering and Glory."

### SCRIPTURE READING

**Romans 8:17-21**

*<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.*

### BIBLE STUDY

#### 1. Looking at the Bible

- Read the passage privately. What does the text say? What is the theme of this passage? Do you notice any keywords?

Digging Deeper:

**Themes:** relationship between present suffering and future glory

**Keywords:** sons/children (vv. 17, 19, 21), creation (vv. 19, 20, 21), suffering (vv. 17, 18), glory (vv. 17, 18)

N.T. Wright writes that when “glory” appears in this passage, it has two primary meanings. First, it is “the glorious presence of God himself dwelling with us [in the present] by the spirit.” Second, it encompasses the “wise, healing, reconciling rule of God’s people over the whole creation.” These two ideas converge in the Christian life just “as they did, and do, in Jesus himself.” This means that we experience God’s glory by “keeping in step with the Spirit” and by letting him transform our hearts and actions (Galatians 5:25). But we also express God’s glory when we faithfully oversee and invest in anything within our care – whether through our jobs, families, communities, or even the environment.

But what about the relationship between “the suffering of this present time” and “the glory that is to be revealed to us” in verse 18? As Paul has already pointed out by repeating the phrase “with him” in verse 17, **we must suffer like Christ in order to be glorified like Christ.** Douglas Moo argues that “suffering” is not only just religious persecution but all sorts of earthly pain like “illness, bereavement, hunger, financial reverses, and death itself.” In their commentary, Barclay and Nida point out that **Paul is reminding the Romans that this future glory will not merely be seen or observed but personally experienced.**

The phrase “subjected to futility” (verse 20) brings up questions for us. Who is subjecting the creation? What does futility mean in this context? **Many commentators conclude that this is a reference to God’s curses after Adam and Eve’s sin in Genesis 3:14-24.** Moo writes that this sense of futility comes from the fact that creation is “unable to attain the ends for which it was made. Humanity’s fall into sin marred the ‘goodness’ of God’s creation, and creation has ever since been in a state of ‘frustration.’” Yet Paul reminds us that this present suffering is not even worth comparing to the greatness of future glory.

## 2. Looking at Jesus

At Central we believe that all of Scripture points to Jesus. In other words, Jesus is the theological center of the Bible. Every passage not only points to Jesus, but the grand narrative of the Bible also finds its fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus.

- In verse 17, Paul writes that just as Christ suffered and was glorified, we partake in his sufferings and glory. Why did Jesus have to suffer before his glorification? Why instead of just dying for our sins did he have to endure the long, painful death on the cross?

### Digging Deeper:

Numerous theologians have given different responses to these questions. St. Anselm of Canterbury emphasized the doctrine of substitutionary atonement and the gravity of the payment Christ paid for us in our place. Our offense against God was infinite, for God is an infinite being. “For the greater the person, the more weighty is the insult if you offend him.” Therefore, Jesus’ death on our behalf reflected the infinite offense of sin we committed. Karl Barth refers to the cross as God’s greatest revelation of his love for us. In our previous series on Jesus’ emotions, we looked at how Jesus’ agony reveals how far Jesus is willing to go to redeem us, and it displays his perfect qualification to empathize with us (Hebrews 4:15) and encourage us in all our pain and affliction (2 Corinthians 1:5).

Jesus himself answers this question, too. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus explains to the two men, “Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” (Luke 24:26). Jesus showed that all of the Scriptures — the Law and the Prophets — indicated that the Messiah would suffer before glory (e.g., Psalm 22:14-18; Isaiah 53:3-5). Along with the mentioned themes, Jesus’ death on the cross also displayed his obedience — to submit to the Father’s will, and to fulfill the Scriptures. The author of Hebrews writes, “For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering” (Hebrews 2:10). John Piper said “We can spend a lifetime probing into why it is fitting, but let Hebrews 2:10 fly like a great banner over the sufferings of Christ. It was fitting — right, good, suitable, beautiful — in the mind of God for our salvation to be accomplished this way and not another way.” Jesus himself asked the Father if there was any other way than this painful death (Matthew 26:39). This was the only way, and Jesus obeyed. Paul writes on Jesus’ obedience, death, and glorification:

<sup>8</sup>And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup>Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup>so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup>and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:8-11)

### 3. Looking at our Hearts

- Read verse 18. Paul encourages the church in Rome that there is an incomparable glory waiting for us. How does this future expectation alleviate the present sufferings? Do you have any experiences of finding comfort in the coming hope?

#### Digging Deeper:

Paul compares and connects the glory that will be revealed to the suffering of the present time. The Apostle writes similar exhortations in his letters to the Corinthian church: “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9); “For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” (2 Corinthians 4:17). The New Testament theologian Ernst Käsemann explains in his commentary that Paul isn’t minimizing the sufferings we experience in life. Rather, Paul is exhorting that the sufferings are not comparable — or literally “of equal value or worth” — to what is to come. Remember that the theme of this chapter is assurance. Paul is offering assurance to the suffering Roman believers that their revealed glory is far better than anything they can experience or imagine in this present life. Thus, although suffering is difficult and painful, we can grieve with hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13), knowing that it is only for “a little while” (1 Peter 1:6). Käsemann concludes, “Although sufferings are taken seriously, they hardly count since their end is near. Imminent expectation comes to expression here.”

### 4. Looking at our World

- Read the following N.T. Wright quote:

“There are serious debates just now about human responsibility in and for creation. Some, seeing the awful mess that humans have made of the world, are saying that we should back off, live simply and let nature put itself right. Others still insist that God is going to burn up the present world anyway and take us off to heaven, so that ecological concern is a distraction from the gospel. And others, including many in our own day, are saying that we humans have to do it all, to sort it all out.”

- What are some arguments you’ve heard on the above topic among your Christian family and friends?

### Digging Deeper:

In his book “Into the Heart of Romans,” N.T. Wright explains that verses 19-21 have often been misinterpreted. Wright blames the misunderstanding on the interpretation of the word “glory.”: “If Romans is read as a book about ‘how to go to heaven,’ then why would we bother with looking after the present space-time world?” However, Paul’s use of glory and glorification, Wright continues, isn’t about Christians going to heaven. Rather, it is about creation being rescued from corruption and being renewed by God and his image-bearers. That is why the creation is “eagerly longing for the revealing of the sons of God” (verse 19). “We normally think of Christians waiting for the Messiah to be revealed; but here it is the cosmos waiting for the Christians to be revealed!” The whole creation, as it was subjected to futility, is waiting for us believers to be revealed as the empowered, righteous stewards who will restore creation to its goodness. N.T. Wright summarizes:

Creation will, he declares, be set free from its slavery to decay; and this will happen when the Messiah’s people are glorified, raised from the dead and thereby given their always-intended authority over the world. This is the glory that will be revealed upon us in verse 18. This is the revelation of God’s children from verse 19.

Verses 17-21 provide the crucial setup and then transition to what Paul explains is the present task of the Church in light of this truth. We’ll see in the following weeks as we progress through the chapter how God assures and promises the renewal and restoration of the whole creation.

**SHARING** Share your prayer requests, thoughts, hopes and fears for the coming week, and as you do consider how this passage might give light to what you are sharing.

**KINGDOM** Pray that we would see ourselves called by God.

**PRAYER** Include other prayer requests.

**SENDING** God’s word is a lamp to our feet. Christ’s teachings are a light to our path. May God’s word take root in our lives. May Christ’s love nourish and sustain us. Amen.