

Message: Sufferings and Glory
By Senior Pastor Tom Harrison
Romans 8:18-25
Romans 8 Sermon Series
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Suffering is part of life. The sooner we grasp this, the better. I recoil when I hear Christians accuse someone of being deficient in faith because they are not living with physical health and material abundance. We are so ignorant about the causes of suffering (Job 2, the blind man in John 9, Paul, etc.) that we must be careful not to tell more than we know. The idea of physical and material abundance bestowed on believers is rooted in the Old Testament when the concept of heaven was vague and not well developed. The Old Testament was more existential – enjoy life “here and now” rather than the great benefit to come later. Heaven became THE destination when Jesus described it.

Christians around the world celebrate “All Saints Day” today. A “saint” in the Bible refers to anyone who is a follower of Jesus. We can learn from studying the biographies of Christians who have been especially holy or effective in ministry. Two things all saints have in common – they have suffered and when they die, they go to live forever in the glory of God.

I am grateful for the example of the saints I’ve known in ministry in the churches I’ve served, including Asbury. It is always appropriate on “All Saints Day” to reflect upon their examples and influence.

The Road Less Traveled begins: *Life is difficult. It is one of the greatest truths. Once we truly see this truth, we transcend it. Once we truly know that life is difficult – once we truly understand and accept it – then life is no longer difficult. Because once it is accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters. Most do not fully see this truth that life is difficult. Instead they moan incessantly, noisily, or subtly, about the enormity of their problems...as if life should be easy. I know about this moaning because I have done my share. Life is a series of problems. Do we want to moan about them or solve them? Do we want to teach our children to solve them?* So many people have said that because they had a problem, there could not be a God. Yet, every person in the Bible suffered. In fact, many people are in the Bible because of the problems they faced. **Job** had major issues. **Paul** had to confront them as well. **Jesus** was called “the suffering servant.” He died – not for His sins, but for ours. Jesus died. God did not deliver Him from crucifixion. However, God did something far better.

Romans 8:18-25

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ 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. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

3 Reasons Why we suffer

- 1.) **Satan**. Genesis 3 and the Book of Job portrays an enemy, called “The Accuser.” This led to....
- 2.) **Sin/Selfishness** We are all human & fallen. I am, you are, we are. All are separated from God. Genesis 3 explains what happened. We are ALL infected. Mortality is 100%. Sin messes with every relationship – with God, others, & self. Creation is affected, too. It groans.
James 4:1-2 *What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.* Selfishness is probably the #1 reason for suffering.
- 3.) **Unknown** We simply do not know why some things happen. We can’t blame the devil, ourselves, or other. Weather related – tsunamis, earthquakes, tornados – can’t easily assign guilt or blame.
- 4.) **The Gospel** - Jesus told us we’d suffer if we follow Him.

5 Helpful Responses to the problem of suffering:

1.) **Accept it** Suffering as a normal part of life. Everybody suffers. Some more than others. God may use a painful moment to help you grow. We often learn the most from our problems.

Inconvenience v “Problems” A guy worked as the front desk in a resort. After a week on the job, he was frustrated with how things were going, so he lashed out at the manager about all the problems he was experiencing. After a 20-minute tirade, the manager finally interrupted him. He said, “*You think you know everything, but you don’t know the difference between inconvenience and a problem. If you break your neck, if you have nothing to eat, if your house is on fire – then you’ve got a problem. Everything else is inconvenience.*” If we learn to separate inconveniences from problems we’ll live better and quite possibly, longer. I’ve known people who have real, chronic, persistent problems....not inconveniences.

2.) **Transform it.** Jesus didn’t explain human suffering or explain it away. Yet, almost everything beautiful in the Gospels originated from pain or something ugly. Jesus’ birth. His miracles occurred because someone was having a problem (i.e. Lazarus). The resurrection happened after the crucifixion. Jesus didn’t bear the cross so much as He used it. Men were at their worst at the cross but Jesus revealed God at His best. Suffering has limitations. It will be put in its place.

3.) **Comfort others.** Paul prayed for his thorn to be removed but God didn’t remove it. He gave Paul the power he needed to use his thorn in ministry. Paul’s thorn has helped so many cope with our struggles. God can use our thorns to help others. Who better to help someone going through cancer or an alcoholic, or being a teenager or a parent of a teen than someone who has “been there/done that?” 2 Cor 1:3-6 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer.* “Helping Others Follow Jesus.”

4.) Be a **Long-term thinker** 2 types of people: Long-term & short-term thinkers. Long-term thinkers know suffering is a normal part of human existence, and even if it lasts through this lifetime, for Christians, suffering is temporary.

John 16:21-22 *When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. So also, you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.* (Show picture of Harrison)

5.) **Keep the end in mind** Heb 12:1-2 *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to 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.*

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. The central New Testament belief = death is a defeated enemy. It’s a formidable enemy, but it’s been conquered. Only Jesus can solve the ultimate problem of suffering = death. The “suffering servant” came to redeem us – we were living under the curse of the law of sin and death.

LIFE IS DIFFICULT....but GOD IS GOOD.