

The Assurance of God

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[0 : 0 0] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word, which reminds us of your promises that declared to us in your Son, Jesus Christ.

And so, Father, we pray that as we look at your word now, that you might help us to focus on it and to be encouraged by it as we look at your promises. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Well, on Friday, our youngest daughter came to me and sighed and then said, Dad, life is so hard.

When I asked why, she said, because I have to clean up my room. Now, for those who didn't see her room two weeks ago, let me remind you of it again on the next slide. This was her room.

And for our youngest, cleaning her room is a source of suffering. In fact, it's a source of suffering for us all. But this time, we promised to help her and we promised her that we would take her to the movies if she cleaned it, ready for the new school term.

[1 : 0 7] And so on the next slide, woo-hoo, very excited, and she got to go to the movies. But she is right, though, isn't she? Life is sometimes hard.

Life does involve suffering. Some suffer more than others, but we all suffer. Two days ago, a man shot nine people at a community college in Oregon.

Don't know if you heard about that. One witness said he ordered students to stand and asked if they were Christians and shot them if they said yes. Or take some friends of ours from an old church who nine months ago lost their eight-year-old son to a brain tumour.

And I know some amongst us here at Holy Trinity are still suffering from long-term diseases. So the question is, how do you keep going?

More than that, the very fact that such suffering exists means for many people, God must not exist. They say, if there was a loving God, then surely he would do something about all this suffering.

[2 : 1 7] So how do we answer those people? Well, while there are a number of answers we can give to both questions, how do we keep going and how do we answer those people, Paul gives us one answer today, and that is the certain hope of glory.

Glory is what helps us to keep going and glory is what God has done about suffering. But to understand this more fully, we have to look at the passage. So it would be great if you had your Bibles there. There's an outline you can follow along as well.

So please turn in your Bibles to Romans chapter 8, page 1133, 1133. And just pick it up at verse 17 so we get the context right. So in verse 17, we read, Now if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.

If indeed we share in his sufferings, in order that we may also share in his glory. Here Paul says that to share in Christ's inheritance, the inheritance the Father will give, to share in Christ's glory, then we must also and firstly share in his sufferings.

Now if that's the case, then you'd want to make sure that this glory was worth suffering for, would you not? What's more, you'd want to know that this glory is also guaranteed, would you not?

[3 : 43] Well, that's exactly what Paul says in our passage today, that our future glory with Christ, sharing in Christ's glory, will far outweigh our present sufferings. And it is guaranteed, it's assured, certain.

So point one, verse 18, he says, I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed for us or to us. Now there are a few things worth noting about this verse just here.

First, sufferings seem to be broadened to include all suffering, not just suffering because we are Christian. For even the suffering of creation is included, as we'll see in a moment.

Second, our present sufferings are part and parcel of this life. I'm assuming you know that, have experienced that. The normal pattern of this life is suffering now, but glory later.

And we need to remember this because there are some churches who teach, it's glory now and glory later. So they say, God wants your good, does he not? God wants to bless you, does he not?

[4 : 50] And so, God wants you to be wealthy and healthy and comfortable in this life now. And if you give money to the church, God will give you these blessings in return. And I'm character-suring, but I've heard it said.

But Romans says, actually the normal experience is suffering now, but glory later. But thirdly, and the main point to note here is that this glory later will be so glorious, it will make our present sufferings fade like a distant memory.

It will make them seem like nothing in comparison. Now that's a pretty bold statement, isn't it? I mean, people suffer some pretty horrific things, don't they?

Christians have lost homes and their lives for being Christian, as I mentioned a moment ago. Other Christians suffer illnesses like depression or Parkinson's, or lose their child to a brain tumor, because we live in a fallen world.

In fact, even Paul himself has suffered greatly. And yet, yet, he can say that his future glory will make his present sufferings all worthwhile.

[5 : 54] In fact, that our future glory will make our present suffering seem like nothing in comparison. So glorious it will be. In fact, even creation is longing for this glory, because then too, it will share in it.

Do you see verse 19? It says, For or because the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one God who subjected it, but in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay, global warming and the like, and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

You see, this future glory is so glorious that even creation waits for it with eager expectation, because then it too will share in it. It will be liberated from its decay, a decay caused by the judgment of God because of the sin of Adam.

Do you remember? Do you remember Genesis 3? God cursed the ground because of Adam's sin. But when God brings us into Christ's glory, then creation will also be made new. It will be made good again, as it was in Genesis.

Do you remember what God said? He saw what he'd made and it was good. And so it will share in our freedom and glory as together we live as we were created to live.

[7 : 19] And so what is glory then? Well, it is sharing Christ's inheritance of verse 17. And note in verse 17 where it says we are co-heirs with Christ, it means that we inherit all that is Christ.

It's not like we go to the lawyer's office when the will is read out and the lawyer says, well, for the son called Jesus, you get the billion dollars inheritance.

And for the rest of you sons and daughters, you get the leftover broken lawnmower out the back. That's not what he's saying. He's saying what Christ inherits, we inherit.

And so the Bible says that we will rule the world with Christ. Did you realize? In fact, the Bible says we will even judge the world and the angels with Christ. All the privileges he has, we will have with him.

We will share in his glory. It's extraordinary. What's more, we become fully like him in character. And our bodies, verse 23, will be fully transformed.

[8 : 22] They'll be perfect as well. No more body image issues, no more pimples or the need to exercise, or perhaps there will be a need to exercise, but we'll actually enjoy it. More importantly, there'll be no more disease.

So those whom we love, who suffer from depression or Parkinson's or autism or whatever it is, will be fully restored. Now that will be glorious. And for some, some friends of ours at another church, different friends, they can't wait for the day that their son will have this transformed body.

For, I think he's now 29 years, he's suffered with severe autism. They're still going because they're looking forward to that day. Transformed body. And as we saw in creation, even creation itself will be transformed.

There'll be no more floods or fires or famine. Glory is enjoying perfect relationships with God, with perfect people, in a perfect body, living in a perfect paradise.

It will literally be heaven on earth. But it is hard to imagine, isn't it? It's hard to imagine the feeling of joy and contentment we'll have on that day. It might be like the feeling that the Hawks had yesterday on the next slide.

[9 : 41] Do you remember? I don't know if you saw the final, but they're pretty stoked. They're holding up three fingers, by the way, just going to clarify that, for three back-to-back premierships. For me, I guess it could be a similar feeling to the feeling I might have on the next slide.

I know, here he is, he's enjoying glory. Next slide. For me, this is glory. Living there, with a children's program, 24-7.

No, I love my kids. But whatever feeling, I mean, it's going to look different for different people, but whatever feeling of joy and contentment that you get from different things, it'll be more than that when we enter glory.

Glory will be so glorious, it will bring us utter joy and contentment. It will be life with God, and each other as it was meant to be. It will literally be heaven on earth. And so it will make our present suffering seem like nothing, by comparison.

But in the meantime, there is groaning. Point two, verse 22. It says, we know that the whole creation has been groaning, as in the pains of childbirth, right up to the present time.

[10 : 53] Paul says, we even know that creation is subject to decay, for it groans in pain, longing for glory. And we see that on the news, don't we? Mudslides, or so-called natural disasters, are the groans of creation.

They're really a sign that is still living under the judgment of God, because of the sin of Adam. But notice, these groans are not without hope. They are likened to the pain of childbirth, which ends with a child.

I've been there for the birth of all three of my children, and I can tell you, it's very painful. Actually, I can't tell you that. I didn't do anything.

Now, it wasn't quite as bad as one dad who fell asleep on the lounge while their wife was in labor. I won't name anyone. Glenn, I think that's right. But even in this pain, there is hope, you see, that the pain will end with something better, worthwhile, like a child.

In other words, even in this groaning of creation, there is hope that the suffering will end with something better. And it's not just creation that groans in hope, with hope, but we also groan.

[11 : 56] Do you see verse 23? Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly, as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.

My kids are pretty good at groaning. You know, can you put your bag away? Can you turn off the TV? Even this morning when I handed out the prayers that they were going to pray. My prayer is shorter than that prayer.

But adults are pretty good groaners too. You know, look at this traffic. These kids keep groaning. And most groaning is actually complaining, but there is a type of groaning that is good.

That is, when things are not as they should be, we ought to groan for the day when they will be. That's the right type of groaning. We ought to groan in a way that does not impatiently complain, but rather patiently longs for glory, longs for the day when Jesus returns, and our present sufferings are replaced with our future glory.

But far too often, we groan in complaint instead of groaning with longing, instead of groaning in prayer that God will save more people and send his son so that all would be put right.

[13 : 15] And so when things are not as they should be, we ought to groan for the day when they will be. But notice like creation's groaning, our groaning has hope of more to come. You see, we are described as those who have the first fruits of the spirit, which implies there is more fruit to come, you see.

In fact, Paul even spells it out for us in verse 24. He says, for in this hope we were saved, but hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?

But if we hope for what we do not yet have, well, we wait for it patiently. Paul is saying that our salvation came with the hope of glory. That is glory is part of being a Christian.

And since we have not inherited this glory yet, well, then it must be more to come. In fact, the hope by its very nature implies there is more to come. You don't hope for what you already have.

No, it's in the future. And so even our groaning and patient longing, even in that, there is still more to come. There's hope of more to come. But as creation and we grow in longing for glory, the spirit also groans, but this time in prayer to help us to glory.

[14 : 27] Do you see verse 26? In the same way, the spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the spirit, because the spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

Here, the spirit groans in prayer to help us and others to glory. I don't know if you've ever experienced this before, where there have been times you've heard some terrible news or something bad has happened to you, and you've just lost for words when you come to pray, or you simply don't know what to pray.

When we heard the news about our friend's eight-year-old son with a brain tumour, we were so overwhelmed. It was like we'd been punched in the stomach. We were winded. And so we tried to pray, God, we're lost for words.

Or the wife of a couple I know who's suffering from a dreadful disease for which there is no cure. Last week, I received an email saying that her health has deteriorated significantly over the last two weeks. And so I wasn't sure what to pray.

Do I pray for a miracle? Do I pray that God takes her quickly and ends her pain? Apart from praying for strength to keep trusting God, again, was lost for words.

[15 : 43] In those times, God says the Spirit prays for us. And verse 27 says that there's this mutual understanding.

God knows the Spirit and the Spirit knows God and God's will. I mean, they're both God, but it means the Spirit's prayer for us will always be effective, always answered positively.

You see, even in our weakness, we are not alone, but the Spirit groans in prayer to help us. And his prayer is heard. Which gives us assurance, does it not? That we and others will make it to glory.

What's more, not only does the Spirit groan for our good, but God is working for our good. And here we see even more assurance of glory. We also come to perhaps one of the most misunderstood verses of the Bible, but have a look at verse 28.

He says, And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

[16 : 44] See, God is at work in all things, even in our suffering for our good. But what is this good? This is where people misunderstand it. And we think our good is to get that job, or to get over this sickness, or whatever.

But God thinks our good is something else. In verse 28, our good is the same thing as his purpose. And his purpose is explained in verse 29. He says, For those God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that Jesus might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

You see, our good and God's purpose is that we are conformed to the likeness of Christ, that we are, that we be who we're created to be as God's children, exactly like God's child, the Son.

His purpose is that we sons of God might become fully like the Son of God, in perfect relationship with God. For then Jesus will be honored as, as the firstborn, the big brother among many brothers.

And we will be as we were created to be. Like in the beginning, when everything was, do you remember that word? Good. That's what God is working towards.

[17 : 59] That's the good he has in store for us. That's his purpose for us. And I wonder if this is our purpose for ourselves, for our families, for our children. Is this what drives us above all else?

Is this what we want for our kids and grandkids and cousins and parents? That they are like Christ. That's what God wants above all else. That's what God is on about.

Of course, we'll only fully be like Jesus when we enter glory. And so that means God must bring us into glory to achieve his purpose of making us fully like Jesus. So verse 30, and those he predestined, he also called and those he called, he also justified and those he justified, he also glorified.

Glorified. Notice the tense of the word glorified. What tense is it in? Present, past, future. I had one person with me.

Thank you. Past. Yeah, I'm going to give the answer. It's in past tense. So what tense is it in everyone? Past. It's as though it's already happened, but we're not there yet. Are we? Why does Paul write it like this?

[19 : 05] Well, because if God is determined to make us like Jesus, to bring us into glory, then it's as good as done. That's why he writes it in past tense. It's as good as done. If God is determined to do this in us and for us, then he can write it as though it's already happened.

Our number two child is very determined. When she sets out to do something, it happens even when we try and stop it. But how much more so can we be certain that when God of the universe is determined to make something happen, it will happen.

We will be glorified. And so it should give us great assurance. And in case we haven't picked up this note of assurance, Paul explodes with questions to drive this home.

I'm going to work through this next bit pretty quickly. So at point three, our glory is guaranteed. Verse 31, what then shall we can say in response to these things? If God, the God of the universe is for us, who can be against us?

The answer is no one. Verse 32, because God did not only spare his son for us, but he was also give us everything we need to make it to glory.

[20 : 13] If God did not spare what was most precious to him, Jesus, if he didn't even spare Jesus for our sake, then how will he not also bring us everything we need to bring us home to glory?

Verse 33, who then can bring any charge against us that might keep us out of glory like we saw in the kids talk? Well, no one, because it is God who justifies us. God has declared us innocent because Jesus died for us.

So verse 34, who can condemn? No one. What's more, verse 34, Christ Jesus who died, more than that, he was raised to life. Well, he is at the right hand of the father praying for us.

And as the spirit's prayer is always effective, so also is the son's prayer for us. And so verse 35, who shall separate us from the love of Christ? No one, nothing.

Verse 38, he says, for I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, nor the present, nor the future, nor any powers, neither height, nor depth, nor anything else in all of creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

[21 : 21] You see, our salvation and glory is all bound up in the love of God. It was the love of God which sent the son of God to die for us. And it was this love of God that means he continues to work in all things for our good.

This love of God, you see, guarantees our glory and nothing and no one can separate us from this love. No wonder Paul exclaims in verse 37 that we are more than conquerors through him who loves us.

We sung that song during the kids talk, we are more, more, more than conquerors. And when our youngest first heard that song as we're playing on the car, she started singing instead of more than conquerors, she started singing, we are more, more, more than cockroaches.

She kind of misheard. That's still true, of course. We are much more than cockroaches, but we're even more than conquerors. That is, whenever we face suffering, whatever groans of frustration we let out, God will bring us through it to glory.

He won't always save us from it, but he will work in it and he will bring us through it to glory because nothing can separate us from his love. Well, three very quick points of application, then wrap up.

[22 : 38] First, in this present world, suffering exists, which means for some people, a loving God cannot exist. If you have friends like that, or perhaps you are here today and think that, then can I say to you that God has done something about suffering.

His love sent his son to die for us so that glory could be opened up for us, that a world where there is no suffering and no pain, can exist for us.

See, God, what God has done about suffering in this world is open up a way for another world to come where there will be no more pain or suffering or disease, where it will be heaven on earth.

And the only reason he has not sent Jesus to return to bring all this about, well, he's patiently waiting for more people to be saved so they don't miss out. And so do you believe in Jesus?

Do you trust in him? Do you love God? No Jesus means no glory. In fact, on the next slide, is it on the next slide? I can't remember if it's on there now. No glory.

[23 : 44] It's chalk and cheese. Remember the hawks? Glory, celebration, no glory. glory. Magnify that eternity. And that's the difference between those who believe in Jesus and inherit glory and those who don't and don't.

So do you believe in Jesus? Secondly, for those of us who do, then do we groan for glory? Do we long for it? Do we live for it? Do we pray for people to become Christians and for Jesus to return?

Are we willing to suffer now for the sake of serving God, knowing that glory will more than make up for it? Or is our priority trying to make sure that we don't miss out on anything in this life?

That we act as comfortable as possible? Do we only follow God as long as it doesn't cost us too much time or money or embarrassment? You see, are we groaning for glory?

Are we living and longing for it? And thirdly, when we do suffer, as we will, it's part and parcel of this life. When we do suffer, we are to remember two things from this passage.

[24 : 43] First, our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us. And second, this glory is guaranteed because it is based on God's love for us from which nothing can separate us.

So let me finish with a story. On the next slide is a lady from an old church. Her name is June. Lovely lady. She didn't have an easy life. She longed to be married, but never was.

She lost siblings and so lived most of her life alone in the family house, which was very small and run down. And yet she sought to serve God in everything she did.

She used to fly planes. I think you can see a little gold plane on clips on her jacket there. And she'd often do it for missionaries and she'd often take books with her to give to other people so they could find out about Jesus.

She played the organ at our church, even though her fingers suffered terribly from rheumatoid arthritis. And although she wasn't that old, her body started to decay such that she had to move into a nursing home, which she did not like.

[25 : 54] In fact, this photo was taken the day before she moved. And yet she persevered in her faith and was still able to smile. In fact, she wanted this photo to be taken for our church directory so that people would know that even though she was moving into a nursing home, she was still part and keen to be part of the church family.

And what was the thing that kept her going through all this? Well, her Lord Jesus and her future glory. A few months after I moved, down to Melbourne, she conquered, well, she conquered her suffering, not because God healed her, but because God brought her home to heaven.

Now she waits in heaven for Jesus to return to earth and bring us all to be with her that together we might all share fully in Christ's glory. Paul writes, I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory to be revealed in us.

and we are more than conquerors through him who loves us. Let's pray. Our gracious heavenly Father, we do thank you for the glory that we have to look forward to and we thank you that this glory is assured.

We thank you that nothing can separate us from your love that is in Christ. Help us to be motivated by this so that we may persevere through times of suffering.

[27 : 19] We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.