

Me? An Overwhelming Conqueror?

Series: *Righteousness Revealed*

Romans 8:18-39

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Last week we talked about how if we want to live in the *freedom* of Romans 8, and not the *struggle* of Romans 7, we need to see ourselves in the right mirror. Not the performance-based mirror of the Law with its shame, guilt, fear, and condemnation, but the grace-mirror of Christ with His love, acceptance, new life, Spirit, and righteousness applied to us. This is important not only in the personal struggle with sin, but also in the challenges of life—the sufferings of life. Suffering makes us question the mirror of Christ. Does God still love me? Is He condemning me? Is that why I’m going through this? Am I still His child? Is He still with me, or has He abandoned me? We may not say it, but we think it and we feel it. Today we’re going to learn more identity truths about those who are in Christ. We have five truths to embrace that will transform our view of suffering and help us see it through the mirror of Christ. The first one is:

If you’re in Christ, you have the hope of glory to come.

We left off in Romans 8:17 with Paul saying we are “*fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.*” He goes on to explain what he means by that. *18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. 19 For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly 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 also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. 23 And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. 24 For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.*

So Paul is not shy about suffering in this world. He was a man well-acquainted with suffering. It’s a normal experience in this fallen world. When mankind fell into sin, creation fell with it. Sin affected us spiritually (Rom. 5) and physically. Adam’s work became harder. The soil was not as fertile, making it harder to cultivate, and thorns and thistles infested the ground. So if your mom, like mine, ever had to use tweezers and pliers to pull stickers and cactuses out your hands and feet, you have sin to thank. Eve would also know pain in childbirth and her relationships. It brought death into the world for all of creation, including the animal kingdom. So all of creation is longing to be set free from the curse of sin that it was subjected to.

This is why I love and hate to watch National Geographic stuff. There are so many beautiful creatures and places in the world. A herd of wildebeest or antelope running across an African plain

is sublime, that is, until they cross the river where crocodiles lie in wait. The world is full of beauty and pain. **Glory** and **suffering**. But glory will *follow* suffering.

Someday, at the consummation of all things, we're going to have resurrected, **glorified** bodies like our Savior and live with Him in a New Heaven and New Earth. That's the ultimate hope. And that's what creation is longing for—the sons of God to be revealed—because that's the sign creation will be set free as well. Creation fell *with man*, and it will be restored *with man* someday.

Paul uses the image of childbirth and says all **creation groans** like a woman in **childbirth**. There is great pain in childbirth, but it's followed by great joy and celebration! It's one of the greatest days you'll ever experience. The pain is worth it because the child is here, and it helps make the pain tolerable. So creation groans until that day when we are born into glory.

But Paul also says that **we groan**. Those of us with the Holy Spirit who can taste the glory to come. The Holy Spirit that He gives us is like the first taste of eternity; the down payment on our eternal inheritance; a preview of coming attractions. He likens the Holy Spirit to **first fruits**. In my former mindset, the first fruits are just the first pass around the edge of the field with the combine, which means there's an entire field to harvest yet! We're just getting started! If you think life with the Spirit is great, just wait! There's more to come. What a difference it makes in our lives if we have this hope!

If we don't have this hope, suffering will leave us cynical, bitter, despairing, and/or at least move us to a place of resignation, playing it safe—for fear that we won't get hurt again by suffering the loss of something. We'll be afraid to love because we might lose. We'll say, "You only live once," and use people and things to try and satisfy us. If our hope is in this world of trouble, our souls are in trouble. It will be heavy, hope-crushing affliction. It won't take much to crush that hope. But if we have this hope of eternal glory, it makes, in the words of the apostle, the sufferings of this world "temporary, **light affliction**" (2 Cor. 4:16-18). When weighed against the eternal glory that we will enjoy, this is light, temporary affliction.

One pastor shared about how this life is a lot like when you're climbing a mountain with dense forest. You're in the thick of the forest with trees and brush so you can barely see the sky or the top of the mountain. You know it's there. You know it's beautiful. You know the place you're in is beautiful. But you can't quite see the spectacular beauty. But as you keep climbing, you finally make it past the tree line and to the top of the mountain. The view from there is breathtaking! *It was there all along, you just couldn't see it.* Romans 8 is like that. It clears the tree line for those who are in the thick of life's suffering and reveals the big picture. Secondly,

If you're in Christ, you have help until the glory comes.

When we suffer, sometimes we wonder if God is there. If He has left us on our own. We question, Has God abandoned me? Though we may feel that way at times, Paul reminds us we always have the Spirit of God dwelling in us always.

26 In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; 27 and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

So not only does creation groan, and we groan, but **the Spirit groans** as well. He enters into our sufferings to help us make it to the finish line of glory. Many of us know that Jesus prays for us. He intercedes for us. But so does the Spirit. He lives in us and knows precisely what we're going through and precisely what we need—even better than we do—and based on this text I believe He communicates that with the other members of the Trinity as to what we need at the moment to carry on and keep going and be made more like Jesus.

The word **help** carries the idea of *lifting someone up or carrying their burden*. As one individual said, this means that “God is not a God who stands on the sidelines and yells, “Hey, suck it up!” Rather, He enter in. He lives in me in order that He might help carry the load.” It reminds me of how helpful it can be to have a running partner. Having someone with you when you run, challenges you and helps you to do better. They help you push through when you're tempted to quit or slow down. They help carry you to the end. That is what the Spirit does for us. He is our running partner in this journey of life. Thirdly,

If you're in Christ, you have meaning in all you go through.

28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

This year I've been experiencing a lot of pain in my right foot. Another sign of sin's affect on creation. Well, the pain has kept me from running and walking like I want to and at this point, I'm not sure I'll be able to do those 5k's this summer or hike the Pine Ridge Trail or other trails like I want. After several weeks of research and treatments on my own, the pain in my right foot wasn't getting better or worse. It was always the same no matter what I did. This told me that something was fundamentally wrong. As I told others about the pain I was experiencing, they all started to pull these white things out of their shoes called orthotics and I felt like I was living under a rock my whole life. Long story short, I went to my chiropractor, and he told me my feet were literally out of shape and we needed to get my foot back into the original shape it is supposed to be in. Well, that was last week, and I've been leaving the orthotics in my shoes a little longer each day until my feet get used to them. It takes time for your feet to conform to the orthotic. But it also comes with some pain. My feet don't like being **conformed** to their original shape again.

In a similar way, God is using **all things**, especially the pain of our sufferings, to mold us or **conform us to the image of Christ**. That image was lost when Adam sinned and through Christ, He is restoring that image. You can't choose a more relevant text for our emphasis on “Christ-

Modeling” this month. Notice he didn’t say all things were good but that they were being used for our good. He also didn’t say some things or most things. He said all things. And I looked up the word “all” in the Greek. You wouldn’t believe it but it means “all.” I would submit even injuries, losses, false accusations, injustices, broken relationships, cruelty, betrayal, hatred, jealousy, abandonment would be included in that. I say that because all these were all things worked into the last few hours of Christ’s earthly life to bring about our salvation.

And I love that Paul did not say, “We *feel* that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God.” Because sometimes we don’t feel that way. We may feel the exact opposite. But when we understand our sovereign God is using them to make us more like Christ, that might just change our feelings—giving us hope, joy, peace, and a winsome attitude. Things are not taking place without His careful guiding hand. Paul even mentions how He is in control of our journey from beginning to end in His eternal plan for our lives. From before time (**predestined**), to the moment we’re drawn to Christ (**called**), to the moment we trust in Christ (**justified**), to the moment we are completely restored (**glorified**), He is in control. He’s so in control that Paul would even put our future glorification in past tense: *glorified*. He’s saying God started us on this journey and He’s going to finish it. There’s no way you *aren’t* going to make it to the finish line. He gives you hope, gives you help, and gives you meaning in it all.

There’s a movie about a high school football team in California who boasts the longest winning streak ever recorded. They won 151 games in a row! However, it was inevitable, the day would come when they would lose. And they did. The first thing the coach said in the locker room to the shaken and disappointed players was, “I truly believe that life’s most impressionable lessons are ones where something bad happens to you or something challenging confronts you.” He reminded them that they would grow through this. They would be better because of it.

Many times, because our hearts long for paradise—for the world to come—we don’t want to hear this. But we need to hear it. God uses the challenges of this life to make us more like Christ. To form Christlike virtues in us. So we do well to ask ourselves, *How is God going to use what I’m going through to make me more like Jesus, and advance the ministry of the gospel at the same time?* This takes us back to our original question at the beginning of Romans: *What in the world is God doing today?* Answer: He is conforming us to the image of His Son. That’s His plan from eternity past. And right now, He is meticulously carrying it out. All of this talk about God’s sovereignty over our lives leads Paul to a series of questions that are designed to remove any doubt in our minds that the events in our lives are haphazard or that we could ever be fall short of the finish line. So fourthly,

If you’re in Christ, you have eternal security.

31 What then shall we say to these things?

I like how the NLT says these “**wonderful things**”? These wonderful things could go all the way back to chapter 5 where we dealt with the security of the believer again. We’re so secure that where sin increases, grace increases all the more. We’re free from the Law and the laws of sin and death. We have new life. We have the Spirit. We have our destiny secured. Therefore, what shall we say?

If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? 33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

In this world, some of the suffering we experience is from other people or even from Satan. But Paul is saying hyperbolically, Who cares? What are they going to do ultimately? *They can't stop your journey to glory.* They can't take you out of the race or make you fall short. If anything, these things are just going to *keep helping God's purpose of molding you into the image of Christ.* If God gave His Son for you, the most precious thing ever, what else would He fail to give you to see this purpose through? What do you have to worry about with that kind of care? And by the way, He's the Judge. He has already declared you righteous. And Jesus, your perfect Advocate, sits at His right hand, declaring you free! No charges will stand. Even when the enemy tries to come after you, he ends up working against himself by working for your victory! So that's what he is going to call us **overwhelming conquerors!** So number five is:

If you're in Christ, you have a new name: Overwhelming Conqueror!

That's your new identity in Christ and why we gave each of you a name tag with that on it.

35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 Just as it is written, "For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This is the crescendo at the end of eight wonderful chapters. **God loves you with love that lasts!** And there is NOTHING—no life circumstance, no pain, no person, no created thing (material or immaterial) that can't stop Him from loving you. He made an irrevocable decision to set His eternal love on you. There will be no close calls at the finish line. No falling short. It will be a runaway victory for every believer. We're going to win the race by a mile. A land slide. Game, set, match.

But remember, this isn't because of your performance or your measuring up or your striving. It isn't because of your accomplishments at being good enough or religious enough. It's because of the grace of God towards you in Christ that you are an overwhelming conqueror. Believing that will make a world of difference in your suffering.

In her book entitled *Mystery on the Desert* Maria Reiche describes the strange hills and valleys in Peru that go on for hundreds of yards and abruptly stop or suddenly turn to the left or right. For centuries these hills were believed to be an irrigation system or boundary markers. People didn't really know what to make of them. However, after the invention of the airplane in 1939, these

seemingly random hills and valleys could be seen to be drawings of birds and animals and humans. They were art that could only be appreciated from a higher, heavenly perspective. In the same way, the events of life—the hills *and valleys*—are woven into the tapestry of God’s creative design for our lives. We might not see it at the time, but we will see it all clearly one day—they are divine art.