

Not Worth Comparing

Romans 8:18-27

I went shopping at the Super Store yesterday for the first time since everything has been turned upside down on account of the corona virus.

It was a bit of an odd experience trying to keep to the suggested six feet apart.

The line for the checkout was wrapped around the outer isle all the way back to the dairy section which I would guess is about 50% of the perimeter of the store.

I am happy to report that most people seemed to deal with the situation fairly well with the exception of one.

When I arrived at the checkout after 40 minutes in line they only had every other checkout open in order to create distance between the customers.

They had installed large Plexiglas shields to create a barrier between the cashier and the customers.

The employees were wearing latex gloves and some of them had masks as well and I noticed some of the customers doing the same.

They only let one person at a time to a till and they had a hand wash/sanitize station set up at the door for people to use as they came in and out of the building.

What kept running through my mind was, "This is different!" and it is likely to be this way for a while.

If you have been out shopping or have watched the news at all then you know that this Corona Virus/Covid 19 outbreak has gripped the world.

It has created enormous disruptions and it is creating a good deal of anxiety for many people for a variety of reasons.

Whether it is health or economics a great deal of people are starting to experience hardship in these days and so I thought that it would be good to turn to the scriptures to get some biblical perspective on what is happening in the world.

[Turn in your bibles with me to the book of Romans. This morning we are going to turn our hearts and minds to **chapter 8:18-27**. We are reminded in these verses about the reality of living in a world full of sickness and death. I believe these verses give us some important truths for our present situation. They show us the great blessing of belonging to Christ it times such as this. Here is the first thing they show us...]

Point #1 – In Christ we have the perspective of eternity.

In the chaos and turmoil of a fallen world which often causes suffering, we need to know that it will all seem small in the never ending presence of our Lord and Saviour.

Notice verse 18.

This verse is only true for the Christian!

Suffering for the unbeliever will continue for eternity.

Most people over the last couple of weeks have come to terms with how fragile our lives are.

A microscopic virus has basically ground the world to a halt.

Many people have and will experience great pain and suffering as a result of what is happening.

But no matter what may come to pass in the here and now it is small in comparison to the eternal judgment of almighty God that comes to those who are dead in their sins.

These days are a poignant reminder of the importance of considering your eternal destiny.

Much of the first part of the book of Romans teaches us of our need of Christ.

It teaches us about our great problem of disobeying God.

It tells us that no amount of good works can ever be enough to earn God's favour.

It teaches us that being right with God happens by faith alone in the life death and resurrection of Christ.

Now if you know that, if you have been born again by the work of the Holy Spirit, then your eternal perspective on the trials of this life is going to be radically different from the unbeliever.

In Christ we are promised eternity with God which will produce in us eternal joy where there will be no more "death, or mourning, or crying or pain." (Revelation 21).

In the first microsecond of eternity all of this will seem small no matter what may come.

Paul says here they are "not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."

That is not to minimize the seriousness of suffering of the present world.

These are serious times and for some of you the disruption of the world is making a bad situation worse.

The point of this verse is not to trivialize our suffering it is to maximize the glory of Christ.

We can see this illustrated to a lesser degree in the experiences of this life.

[Remember Jacob in the book of Genesis. Remember how he had to run away from home because his brother wanted to kill him for cheating him out of his birth right. He ends living with a relative of his mother named Laban. Laban gives him a job as a shepherd as Jacob

agrees to work for seven years in order to marry his daughter Rachel. The bible says that the seven years seemed “like just a few days because of his love for her.” If you know about the job of a shepherd then you know it was a tough job and seven years is a long time. The point is not that it was an easy seven years, but that it seemed easy because he treasured his reward so much.]

As Christians whenever we face hardship of any kind we must always keep in mind that it is temporary.

We need to remember that when we enter into eternity all we have endured for Jesus’ sake in this life will fade instantly from our memories as we behold the glory of our Lord.

Are you struggling with fear and anxiety? Set your mind upon eternity.

Are you feeling helpless and alone? Know that King Jesus is upon His throne and if you trust in Him He will bring you to a place where every tear is wiped away.

Do you feel like your world is slipping away from you? Stop trying to hold on so tightly to the world and cling to Christ.

[The hope of glory has to be on our minds when dealing with things like our current situation. But that is not the only thing we should keep in mind. Here in another thing that we need to remember...]

Point #2 – In Christ suffering has purpose.

The Bible repeatedly tells us to “rejoice” in all things even things like trials. That command would be utterly senseless unless God intends the trials we face for our greater good.

The apostle Paul points to the very beginning of creation to show this point (verses 19-21).

We live in a world that is according to verse 20 has been “subjected to frustration.”

Near the end of verse 20 is really important because we learn there that the creation was “subjected to frustration” by a person.

There is no doubt that this is a reference to Genesis 3:17-19.

There we read that God cursed the creation.

Here is the big question, “Why?”

Why did God curse His own creation?

We need to see this if we are going to have a Biblical view of things like the coronavirus.

We need to see that God cursed the creation because of sin!

God who is completely holy cannot tolerate sin without consequence.

For this reason he casts Adam and Eve away from His presence and cursed the earth which was made for them to enjoy for His glory. This is why we have sickness and death in the world today.

When we look on or personally experience sickness/suffering we ought to be reminded of the horror of sin.

What we are experiencing now is the reality of a world living in rebellion against God.

It is important to make clear that this is the big picture of sickness and suffering and should never be used to sit in judgment over any particular situation.

We can't assume that the people getting sick and dying from the coronavirus or any other disease are worse than others.

We can simply say that sickness exists because human beings generally speaking show contempt for the splendor of the LORD.

We need to see that if we are going to see God's purpose for all of this.

Look there again at the end of verse 20 and 21, it says there that God subjected the creation to the current state of things **"in hope..."**

God's intention for sickness is to show us the horror of sin and our need for forgiveness and restoration.

God would be totally just in wiping us all out in an instant, but He doesn't.

Instead He gives the world a taste of the consequence of sin calling us to repentance and looking forward to the redemption of all things.

While the unbeliever may grow in their hatred for God in the face of suffering the believer must resolve to trust in the good purposes of God.

God has not left us in our rebellion against Him, He has changed our hearts given us a desire to righteousness and has produced its fruit in our lives.

Therefore, the curse of this world no longer reigns over us in death, but rather the trials of this life serve to refine us as beloved children of the King of Kings.

When Paul writes this he clearly has in mind enduring hardship for the sake of Jesus.

That may come in the form of persecution, it may come in the form of making willful sacrifices for the sake of the gospel, and it certainly includes every hardship that is used to conform us further into the image of Christ.

That last one is the one that relates to our current situation.

God intends the hardships we are facing to make us more like Jesus and if that goal is achieved then any pain we endure will seem small in comparison to that great and eternally precious result.

[A few years ago I attended the funeral of someone I worked with briefly for a couple of summers when I was in college. At the funeral I heard about how when he received a terminal

diagnosis from his doctor he turned towards the Lord accepted Christ and began to passionately seek after Him. If we assume that his conversion was genuine and that he is now with Christ forever, then do we not have to see his sickness as having an immeasurably good purpose? If he had died in a car accident or had a heart attack he would have been lost, but instead an illness brought him to Christ.]

Believing in a Sovereign God Who has a good purpose for His people in all things is an act of faith.

It is a faith that is based on good reason and there are some practical things that should result from our trusting in the Lord.

First, we can look to the past.

Both in our own experience of walking with the Lord and seeing how He deals with His people in the pages of scripture remind us of His faithfulness.

Next, we can resolve to not waste our trials but ask the Lord to use these things to make of more like Jesus.

Further, we can ask God to make Christ more precious in our sight than the things of this world and therefore see our current trials as exchanging something of limited value for someone of infinite worth.

The world in its present form will not remain forever, God will one day 'liberate' His people and His creation from "it's bondage to decay."

[If we have the right perspective on sickness and suffering then we will rightly see it as something that is not right in the world that we need to be rescued from. That leads us into another important truth for times like this. It is very easy to get comfortable with the condition of the world, but moments like this tend to shake us out of our complacency. If we set our minds on eternity, if we believe that God has a purpose for all things, then we are on the right track, but these next few verse also teach us that...]

Point #3 – In Christ we must long for the end of suffering.

We ought to have a deep desire to see the end of sickness and pain of all kinds.

Look with me at verses 22-23.

Paul talks about waiting for the coming of Christ like "groaning as in the pains of childbirth."

Why use that illustration?

Because God says in Genesis 3 that the pain of child birth is the result of the fall.

It is another reminder of the curse and when a woman is experiencing that pain there is a strong desire for it to come to an end.

And if at the end of the pain a mother gets to hold her son or daughter in her arms there is joy following the pain.

So there is a hope that the pain will result in something good but there is also a strong desire for the pain to come to an end.

That is what Paul is getting at when he writes in verse 23 that we “groan inwardly as we wait eagerly” for our redemption.

I have to confess that my heart’s longing to be with the Lord feels far too small!

I am far too tied to the things of this world.

I think many of us would like to hang around here until we’ve gotten all we can out of this life and then when we are no longer happy here we want to go to heaven.

But these verses point us in a different direction!

There ought to be a deep longing for the brokenness of this world to be repaired.

Imagine what our lives would be like if we had such a longing for the coming of Christ that this world lost its attraction.

That is the kind of perspective that helps us to conquer sin in our lives because the things that sin has to offer become unattractive as we consider our future glory with God.

That is the kind of perspective that causes people to give their lives to the mission field to bring the gospel of Christ to people who have never heard.

It is the kind of perspective that causes people to forget about keeping up with the neighbors and strive to support the needs of missionaries and church ministries.

It is the kind of perspective that when sickness or suffering comes they are met with the peace and security of a sure hope in a future glory.

[We all know what it is like to look forward to something. We look forward to birthdays, to weddings, to anniversaries, to retirement, to vacation, and to all kinds of other things. We say things like I can’t wait until I get to go on vacation or until my birthday comes. We know what it is to look forward to things.]

How much more should we look forward to Jesus’ coming?

I fear that many of us would be quite content to have this world go on indefinitely if we never had to experience anything bad.

I fear the absence of Jesus would bother us very little if things in the world didn’t cause us any pain.

But even if everything in our life is exactly the way we want then we should still long for the coming of Christ, because that is far better.

This is what happens when we are born again. The Spirit gives us a longing for the coming of Christ that refuses to be satisfied by anything else.

[Moments like the one we are in now make us long for them to come to an end. I suspect this crisis will come to an end at some point but our longing for Jesus' return must never fade, but must grow over time as we are able to treasure Him more and more. In these days let us remember that in Christ there is hope, let's remember that God has a purpose, and let us increase in our longing for the end of all suffering. There is one more important point here that we need to see. We need to see that...]

Point #4 – In Christ we depend on the Holy Spirit.

Going through hardship is not easy, but remember as Christians we are not alone in our struggles. [Verses 24-27]

Without a doubt we have a great hope of an amazing future with Christ, but we are not there yet.

In the mean time we still have to deal with all the difficulties that this fallen world brings.

Verse 25 says we wait for our future with Christ “patiently.”

That is hard to do especially when we are facing serious trials.

It is hard not to worry and get upset and angry.

It is understandable to question our circumstances when they are difficult.

Time like this reveal how frail we are as human beings.

That is why I love what it says in verse 26.

The Holy Spirit helps us beyond our own capacity.

When we don't know what to pray for or how to pray, the Spirit steps in and guides us along.

Notice the end of **verse 27** that the Spirit steps in for believers “in accordance with God's will.”

I said earlier that the Bible gives us the big picture when it comes to suffering/sickness.

We need to know that sickness is the result of a world that has fallen into sin, that God intends the terrible reality of suffering to drive us to Him for the solution, and God wants us to long for the end of suffering.

That is the big picture of God's desire for things like sickness, but what about our individual circumstances?

Paul speaks to that here.

If I am understanding verses 25-27 rightly here they are telling us about what God is saying about the details of individual circumstances.

He is saying to His people, “Trust Me.”

We need to understand that God sees things we do not.

Therefore He does things and allows things to happen that we would not.

But we are not left alone with our struggles.

We are not left alone when we don't know what to make of what is happening in our lives.

In those moments the Holy Spirit ministers on our behalf and helps us desire God's will and not our own.

[Imagine being blind folded and in a place that is filled with dangerous obstacles. If you move you may end up running into a wall or you may end up falling off of ledge. Now imagine you also have a faithful friend with you who is not wearing a blind fold. What you would need to do most in that moment is trust your friend.]

Who is more faithful than the Holy Spirit living in the heart of God's people who have been purchased by the precious blood of Christ?

We can trust that the Lord will lead us and care for us in times of trial.

We may not know what to do, we may not even know how to pray, but we can trust that the Holy Spirit is at work in these times.

I want that in my life. I want to keep in mind the big picture and I want to trust God with the details.

I want to glorify God in all the circumstances of my life so that no matter what I am going through people around me would see His goodness they would see that there is hope in this fallen world and that hope comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

In these days let's keep an eternal perspective.

Let's remember that God has a good purpose for His people in everything.

Let's long for the coming of Christ.

And let's depend on the work of the Holy Spirit to see us through.