

Future Glory & Present Pain
Romans 8:18-25
#33 in a Series on Paul's Letter to the Romans
Faith Community Church – June 18, 2006

Objective: *to help our congregation see that the future that God has promised allows us to bear up under the difficulties of today.*

Introduction

At the base of the Statue of Liberty is this poem:

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
"Keep ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Over the years millions of people have passed through Ellis Island. Despite differences in nationality and culture, they shared a common hope that something better lay ahead. I want to try to capture a bit of that spirit for us today.

Read Romans 8:18-25.

Before we look into what this passage teaches, let's define the concept of glory. Glory is first a characteristic of God. It is a word that describes his splendor and majesty. But this text (as was true of verse 17), tells us that we will share in his glory: in fact, we will be glorified. What does this mean?

The best way I know to describe the idea of glorification is that it speaks of our attaining to our place of ultimate purpose, which is to bear the image of God. That is the end result of the salvation that God has provided for us in Christ. But as we've seen in verse 17, the path to glory involves pain.

Future Glory & Present Pain

1. Present sufferings are not worth comparing to future glory. (18-23)

- a. Does that mean that present pain doesn't matter?
 - i. We can go to two extremes in the way we look at our difficulties:
 - 1. No one has it worse than me.
 - 2. Other people have it worse than me, therefore my problems don't matter.
 - ii. The Bible is clear that God uses difficulties in our lives, and they are not to be minimized as unimportant. However, in comparison to final glory, they cannot hold a candle.
- b. What is "future glory" and why does it overshadow present pain?
 - i. For us, the key component of future glory is the final and full redemption of our bodies. (19,23)
 - ii. Our future glory is a part of God's spectacular plan to redeem all of creation. Let's try to understand his argument:
 - 1. What Paul says about creation:
 - a. Creation now exists under a curse – Gen 3:17-19.
 - b. Creation awaits its future liberation, as if it is groaning with labor pains in anticipation.
 - 2. What Paul says about us:
 - a. Creation cannot be redeemed until we are redeemed.
 - b. Like creation, we groan inwardly, waiting for our redemption. You have experienced this groaning whenever you've been frustrated at the physical decay that takes place in your, or at the moral decay around you, and you wish that it was different.¹
 - 3. What is Paul's purpose in making this connection? Two things to impress upon us:
 - a. We need to be reminded that this life is not all there is.
 - b. Even more, as difficult as life gets, as painful as it might be, as overwhelmed as we might feel, this will all disappear in the glory that awaits us. See 2 Cor. 4:7-18.

[Excursus: In my reading this week, one author made the point that when the Bible talks about heaven, it often tells us what it's not like rather than what is. That is because on one hand we can't comprehend what glory will be like. But on the other, we do relate to what we will be finished with once we are made whole. See Revelation 21:1-5.]

¹ Moo, (NIC, p. 519): By saying that Christians "groan in themselves," Paul suggests that these groans are not verbal utterances, but inward, nonverbal "sighs," indicative of a certain attitude. This attitude does not involve anxiety about whether we will finally experience the deliverance God has promised – for Paul allows of no doubts on that score (cf. vv. 28-30) – but frustration at the remaining moral and physical infirmities that are inevitably a part of this period between justification and glorification (see 2 Cor. 5:2,4) and longing for the end of this state of "weakness."

2. Therefore (because of what God is going to do), we can go through life – with all of its difficulties and disappointments – with hope because of what is to come. (22-25)
 - a. Our salvation gives us this hope – not just of past and present forgiveness and of God’s involvement in our life, but of future glory.
 - b. We need to have the attitude of an immigrant. You’ve seen the pictures of people gathered at the bow of a ship, anticipating a better life in a new country. That is us, looking ahead to future glory.

How Should We Respond to this Passage?

1. I am aware in myself that future glory can be so easily obscured by the present that its promise seems too distant to mean anything. We need to think and pray about this, for clearly future glory gives us perspective on the life that we live now. And we need that, which is why John writes what he does in 1 John 3:2-3.
2. Be sure that you have a share in this future glory. It comes by repenting of our sin – not matter how great or small it may seem – and trusting in Christ as our Savior and Lord. If you need help working through this, I invite you to talk to me. Don’t put it off. There is a great future for God’s children. I hope that you have a part in that.