

Labor Pains

July 23, 2017

Romans 8: 12-25:

¹² My dear friends, we must not live to satisfy our desires. ¹³ If you do, you will die. But you will live, if by the help of God's Spirit you say "No" to your desires. ¹⁴ Only those people who are led by God's Spirit are his children. ¹⁵ God's Spirit doesn't make us slaves who are afraid of him. Instead, we become his children and call him our Father. ¹⁶ God's Spirit makes us sure that we are his children. ¹⁷ His Spirit lets us know that together with Christ we will be given what God has promised. We will also share in the glory of Christ, because we have suffered with him. ¹⁸ I am sure that what we are suffering now cannot compare with the glory that will be shown to us. ¹⁹ In fact, all creation is eagerly waiting for God to show who his children are. ²⁰ Meanwhile, creation is confused, but not because it wants to be confused. God made it this way in the hope ²¹ that creation would be set free from decay and would share in the glorious freedom of his children. ²² We know that all creation is still groaning and is in pain, like a woman about to give birth. ²³ The Spirit makes us sure about what we will be in the future. But now we groan silently, while we wait for God to show that we are his children. This means that our bodies will also be set free. ²⁴ And this hope is what saves us. But if we already have what we hope for, there is no need to keep on hoping. ²⁵ However, we hope for something we have not yet seen, and we patiently wait for it.

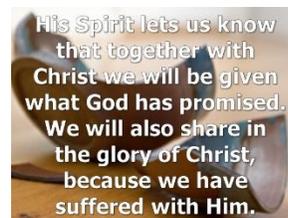


Last week we began our new series, "Broken: Good News for Tough Times". I spoke about the broken spirits and broken bodies that we all experience from time to time. There are

many causes of the brokenness that we occasionally feel in our lives ranging from loss to sin to factors outside of our control. During these times, we can feel much like this broken vase that sat here before us last Sunday. We have all felt broken and less than whole at times in our lives. But our good news remains: God wants to bring us healing and wholeness because we are His dearly loved children. Today we continue the series as we delve into how God seeks to make us new and whole again, moving us past our pain and brokenness. Let us pray.

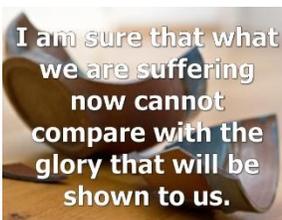


Our passage today begins with one of the key themes of last Sunday's passage. In verse 12 Paul reminds us again, "*My dear friends, we must not live to satisfy our desires*". Last week we talked about the constant battle that is waged within us between the Spirit and Satan. Paul encourages the Romans, and us here today, to choose God's ways and not the desires of our flesh and the ways of the world. As I stated last week, we cannot win this battle on our own. As Paul writes to us today, "*you will live, if by the help of God's Spirit you say 'No' to your desires*". When we live with the help of God's Spirit, we are identified as His children. As God's children, we enter into a relationship with God the Father, the one who loves and cares for and provides for His children. Paul reminds us that the Spirit makes us sure that we are God's children. In verse 17, hear again our reassurance: "*His Spirit lets us know that together with Christ we will be given what God has promised. We will also share in the glory of Christ, because we have suffered with Him*". "Sharing in the glory" - this is the hope, the end game of our faith. We know that as followers of Jesus Christ we will one day share in



the glory of heaven, our eternal home in glory. As Christians living in Winner, South Dakota, however, are pretty removed from any suffering.

As Paul writes the book of Romans to the church in Rome, many there and around the world are suffering at the hands of the Roman government. This suffering and persecution has left many feeling broken in spirit and in body. The Roman government's persecution of Christians makes following Christ a real commitment because it is a dangerous choice. It is not an easy choice to make. The choice has cost some believers their families, some their friends, and, for a few, their very lives. Paul reminds them of the bigger picture in verse 18 when



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he writes, "*I am sure that what we are suffering now cannot compare with the glory that will be shown to us*". The promise of heaven is out here. It awaits. This promise of sharing in the glory of Christ would sound like good news to the new believers in Rome. If the believers themselves did not suffer, they certainly knew of other believers who willingly suffered for their faith. The suffering is definitely close at hand, if not personal.



Labor Pains

In our passage today, Paul then compares this suffering to labor pains. Now although I did not personally feel the labor pains that Kristin endured during the birth of our three children, I was present and certainly felt for her as she went through those labor pains. While I did what I could to bring her comfort and strength in the midst of that physical suffering, I did not experience her pain. For all the mothers here today, like Kristin and like the mother in this picture, you can relate much better

to what Paul is referring to than any of us non-mothers here today. But if you have been present in a hospital room when a woman is giving birth, you have an idea of the pain involved in labor. You can see the pain on her face in this picture.



Although there is great pain in labor, labor pain is not a fruitless pain. I think you would be hard pressed to find a woman here today who would say that her child was not worth the pain. Most mothers would in fact endure many times the level of pain for the joy of the child that came out of that pain. It is pain with a purpose; it is pain with the promise of new life emerging. And so it is with our faith.



For Paul and the new believers that he was writing to, they were eagerly awaiting the return of Christ. Although for some it had begun to shift, for most they believed that Christ would return any day. We too understand that Christ *could* come back any day, even this hour, but we do not live with the sense of an imminent return. For most Christians today, we live with the sense that Christ *will* return one day. But for Paul and his audience, they were still living with the idea that Christ would return really soon. Therefore, in the midst of the suffering they were going through on a daily basis, this hope would be what sustained and helped them to endure. So when Paul writes that "*all of creation is eagerly waiting*", they could really relate. The pain and suffering were present realities and the hope of Christ's return was a real and present help to them. As it would turn out, the return of Christ was not something that would happen in their lifetimes. Their glorious new birth into

eternal life would come, but it would come through death. Who they would be in eternity would be revealed when they stepped across that threshold and entered their new, perfect, and glorious life with the risen and resurrected Christ. Their hope would be realized.

For each of us here today, our glorious and new birth may not take place during our lifetimes either. On the one hand, we eagerly await the day when we stand with Christ in glory. But on the other hand, we hope it is somewhere in the future. Here and now, we are not who God created us to be. In this sense, we are still in the process of being created, of being made more into the image of Christ. God continues to work on us, to mold and shape us, to trim and prune us, to push us out of our comfort zones. Through the presence of the Holy Spirit, God continues to guide us to become and live as the new creations that we will be made into through Jesus Christ living in us. What we will be has not yet been revealed. John Wesley referred to this as the 'journey to perfection'. Every day God desires to be at work in us, making us more and more into the image of Christ. Our faith should be a continual journey and the goal is to become more and more like Christ. We never get 'there'. Truth be told, not much brings me more joy in ministry than that 92-year-old woman who is still coming to Bible study each week because she knows that she can still grow closer to her Lord and Savior. We look at her like she is a saint but she knows better. She wants to grow closer, so she keeps coming. It is a beautiful thing. Beautiful.





Often this “work” that God does in us springs forth from that place of brokenness and the healing that God brings us as He lifts us out of the broken places of our life. God brings us healing and wholeness when we have been broken and, through this, we emerge as a new creation. Sometimes this process is like the pains of labor. Letting go of a dear loved one can be a difficult and painful process. Giving up that sin that we have held onto in secret for so long can be a hard and painful process. Giving in and following that new path that God is revealing to us can be a challenging and painful process as we lay aside control and pride and perhaps other parts of ourselves that still cling to our old self. But like a mother in labor pains, it is pain with a purpose. It is pain with the promise of new life emerging as God reveals to us who we, as the children of God, were born to be. This is a beautiful process as well.

Becoming a new creation as we are constantly being molded and reshaped by God is sometimes uncomfortable. Letting go of our vices and the desires of the flesh can be hard. Trusting more and more in God is challenging because it requires us to relinquish more and more control to Him. We must become less so that He can become more. But as we emerge on the other side, as we look back and see how we have grown and have been transformed, we can see that it was worth the labor pains and the change on our ‘journey to perfection’. Our faith emerges stronger, our relationship with Jesus is deeper, and we have become more like Christ.

As we grow in our faith, we soon find ourselves where Paul is writing about in verse 19. We find ourselves “*eagerly waiting for God to show who His children are*”. As our faith matures, we long for God to be at work in us, drawing us ever closer to the image of Christ, bringing us ever nearer to who He created us to be. What we maybe shied away from when our faith was immature, we come to long for. We long for this because we have come to find peace and comfort and strength and so much more when we are living as God desires for us to live, in an intimate and personal relationship with our Father God and His Son Jesus Christ, trusting in Him and His plans for our lives.



And now I must ask: are you living daily in an intimate, personal relationship with Jesus Christ, begging Him to change you and to bring you rebirth each day? Do you awake each day and pray for God to be at work in your life, ever making you more and more into the image of Christ? Do you arise each day and willingly cede control of your life to Jesus? If you answered ‘no’ to any of these questions, I invite you to choose to have an intimate, personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

The reality is that God is in control. All things are under God’s power. We can either choose to live within God’s will or we can choose to exert and follow our own will. We choose. Each day we choose. It is only when we choose God that we have eternal hope. Only with Jesus as our Lord and Savior do we one day experience what Paul wrote of in verse 23, that one day “*our bodies will also be set free*”. One day, one day.



Until then, God is in control. He is in control of the stretching and tearing, of the breaking down and the building up. God is using all of the joys and trials of our lives to recreate us, to change us, to transform us. There is no pain or experience that God cannot use or redeem. There is no struggle or situation that God cannot use to strengthen us.



God desires to use His power to create beauty from brokenness, to bring new life out of our pain. It is a process. It takes time. Our broken vase has become a little more whole. It is not perfect, but it is more whole. This is what God desires to do with our brokenness too. God wants us to be whole, to be who we were created to be. May we each open ourselves and allow God to bring new life out of our pain. This is my hope and prayer for each and every single one of us. Let us pray.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

- 1) When have you “suffered” for or because of your faith? How did this help you to grow closer to Christ or to mature in your faith?
- 2) How willing are you to allow God to be in control and to be at work in your life? How has God recreated and reshaped you on your faith journey?
- 3) How is your faith like that 92-year-old woman who comes weekly to Bible study? What changes do you need to make to have this type of faith?