

Paul in our reading for this evening shows us what it means to be confident, what it means to be certain about our salvation in the midst of all of our suffering. And it is the Spirit who gives us this certainty, the Spirit who points us towards what is to come. Because Paul tells us very clearly that we can be sure of our salvation because of the glory which is going to be revealed to us.

And this glory is not the present time, Christians. We live in the time of suffering. We live in a time of sin. The glory which is to come is not yet here. We are still looking forward to it. So this glory is not yet ours. It's something that we are going to obtain. And it's not just heaven. I think we can sometimes get that idea, that glory is just going to heaven. No, it's something more than that, although that's certainly part of it too. Glory refers to our full salvation, our full redemption in the days ahead. Because yes, we're saved already. That's true. But there is a sense in which we are not yet fully saved. There is a sense in which we are still waiting for our salvation to come. Because when Jesus returns and glorifies us, then we will be fully saved. We will no longer be able to sin. We will no longer be suffering. We will no longer be struggling with any of these things. On that day we're going to be fully redeemed. And so on that day we'll be like Jesus in every single way. So we're waiting for that glory. We're looking forward to it. We are pushing forward towards it, looking forward to the glory which is to be ours.

But what does this glory look like exactly? Paul tells us several things in our reading for tonight. He says in verse 18: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." So this coming glory, then, will be far greater than our present suffering. We won't even be able to compare the two. They aren't even going to be in the same category. Because when that glory comes, everything that was before it will be forgotten. Think of it this way. If you had a scale, for example, and you put all of your present suffering, all of your present struggles, on one side of that scale, it's going to seem pretty heavy. It's going to make that scale sag pretty far to that side. It's something that we wonder: "How could you ever deal with this? How could we ever get around this? How could we ever possibly forget the things that we're suffering?" But when you put the glory which is to come on the other side of that scale, not only will it make it tip that way, it will do it so quickly that it will seem like there was nothing on the other side. That our suffering now is as nothing compared with what is to be. And so that's what we're looking forward to, Christians, knowing that the glory which is to come will cause all of our present sufferings to pass away.

And do you see how that can give us confidence for the present time? Because when we know that what is to come is far greater than what we're dealing with right now, that gives us the strength to stand firm. It helps us see things in the light of eternity, to see that the things that we're struggling with now are passing. They're fleeting. They will soon be gone, blown away like a feather in the winds of eternity. When we know that, Christians, we can endure and look forward to what is to come. Because when we are glorified with Jesus, all of our present suffering will pass away.

What else does Paul say about this coming glory? He says in verse 19: "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God." This creation is, of course, referring to the physical world around us, everything else in the universe besides us. Paul says that it too is groaning under the weight of sin. It too is in bondage to corruption. It's broken because of the sin

of men. And just look around you, Christians. We can see easily how this is true. Because we can see the natural disasters which happen. We can see the crop failures. We can see things not working the way they're supposed to. We can see animals suffering, and on and on for a very long time. We can see how the creation is groaning under the weight of sin. Because when Adam fell into sin, all of creation was put under that sin, subjected to corruption. Thorns and thistles came into existence because of Adam's sin. Hard labor and fruitless labor became part of life because Adam fell. Just read Genesis chapter 3. Compare it with what you see around you, and you will see what Paul is saying is true. And so the creation too is waiting for that day of glory. And when Jesus returns, the creation will be set free. The creation will no longer be bound to sin. It will be renewed so that we will have a new heavens and a new earth, one which is no longer subject to the power of sin. And that too helps us deal with our present suffering, knowing that all of the things we see happening around us will also come to an end, and that the creation itself will be renewed on the day when Jesus makes us like himself forever.

But we have to wait for that glory. That's probably the hardest thing of all. Because as Paul says in verse 23: "Not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." We are also groaning under this weight. We are also wondering how long all of this will go on. And it's because we have to be patient that we struggle the most. Because we're left to ask questions like: "Why do I have to deal with this? Why is the world so broken? Why do I have to wait? Will that day ever come? When will it come? How long, O Lord? How long do we have to wait?" And it can be real hard to be patient, especially when we're struggling right now.

But the Spirit teaches us to be patient. The Spirit teaches us how to wait. Because as Paul says in verse 26: "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words." The Spirit helps us pray. Because so often in our prayers, we do groan under the weight of sin, asking God how long do we have to put up with this. And sometimes that groaning happens in a way that you can't even put into words. But the Spirit is there with us, teaching us how to pray, teaching us how to be patient, teaching us how to call on God in the midst of our suffering. And the Spirit shows us that we can have hope, that we can trust in God and know that he's finally going to bring all of these things to an end.

Because the main thing, Christians, that the Spirit teaches us is what Paul says in verse 28: "We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." That's a verse we should all memorize and repeat to ourselves often, especially in the midst of our suffering. Because all things work together for good. Not just some things, not just the good things, the things that we might like, but all things work together for good. Even the suffering we're going through right now. Because on the other side of that suffering, Christians, is glory, the promised glory that is waiting for those who love God. Because remember this: Jesus suffered greatly on the cross before he entered into his own glory. And that glory he is now in is far beyond our ability to even put into words. But that same glory will be yours, Christians, when we suffer together with him. Because by passing through our sufferings as Christians, by taking the crosses that God himself lays upon us, we are made more and more like Jesus. Without those crosses, we can't become like Jesus. But with those crosses, we are being shaped to look like him in every way. So that pain that we suffer of being rejected

in this world because we are Christians leads us to glory, because it makes us like Jesus, who himself was rejected by his own people. The suffering that we go through on account of Christ leads us to glory, because it makes us like Jesus, who suffered on our behalf. Whatever we lose in this life for the sake of God leads us to glory, because it makes us like Jesus, who lost everything for us. And whatever else we suffer as Christians, the pains and the trials of this life which we go through in faith, will lead us to glory, because they show that God loves us and wants to make us like his Son forever.

Because all of this, Christians, is part of God's plan to save you. Notice what Paul says in verses 29 and 30: "For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined, he also called. And those whom he called, he also justified. And those whom he justified, he also glorified." God foreknew you. He knew who you would be even before he began to create the world. He knew everything about you, everything that would happen, your entire life far better than you even know yourself. And having foreknown you, Christians, he predestined you. He chose you for himself to suffer along with his Son, because it is only through that suffering that we become like Jesus. All of this is part of God's plan. But having predestined you, having chosen you, he called you, called you to faith, called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. And having called you, he also justified you. He said that you are now righteous, innocent in his sight because of his Son. And if he's done all of that, Christians, he will also glorify you. He will make you to be like Jesus forever, in every way, in the age to come. That is a promise, a solemn guarantee. All of those who love God will enter into glory. You can count on it. And that glory which is to come will never come to an end.

So knowing all of this then, we can face our suffering. Because when Jesus returns to glorify us, we will be like him in every way. And more than that, Christians, we'll also see him face-to-face. Don't you long for that day? That day when you will see Jesus as plainly as we see each other right now? And on that day, what a joy it will be! Because if there is joy in heaven, Christians, over one sinner who repents now, how much joy is there going to be when all of God's people enter into glory to be with him forever? What a day that will be! That's what we're looking forward to. That's what waits for us on the other side of our cross.

So stand firm, Christians. Don't give in. Hold the line! All the things that you are suffering right now will pass away, and you will enter into a glory far beyond anything you can imagine right now.

Let us pray. Lord Jesus Christ, you have promised that through suffering our crosses, we will become like you. Keep us steadfast, O Lord, in true faith, looking forward to the glory which you have promised to us, so that we can see you face-to-face forever. Come, Lord Jesus, and come quickly! Amen.