

THE GLORIOUS HOPE

Romans 8:1-39

Key Verse: 8:17

"Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory."

8:1-17 is a brief review of chapters 1-7. It is indeed worthwhile to review what God has done. God, in his great mercy, made a plan for world salvation (Ge 3:15, Jn 3:16). Otherwise, human beings would only suppress the truth of God, and pile up the wrath of God upon themselves. God, in his righteousness, should have destroyed sinful man. Instead God sent his one and only Son to save us from our sins. In this way, God satisfied his righteousness. Also, he justified us as "not guilty" (3:24); we are no more objects of God's wrath, but precious children of God, purchased by the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ (Ro 5:8). We must remember God's loving grace all our lifetime. In lesson 5 we studied "The Growth of Faith." Today we want to study 8:1-39, "The Glorious Hope." In today's passage we learn the main point of hope. The main point of hope is that we will be heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ through redemption. If we really know what the main point of Christian hope is, we will be filled with heavenly joy and have a sense of victory.

I. The glorious faith (8:1-17)

First, there is now no condemnation (1-4). Look at verse 1. "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Since we are freely justified by faith, we must first believe that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. However, it is easy for us to fall into self-condemnation. For example, Cain killed his lovely younger brother Abel out of his jealousy. Nevertheless, God visited this man who had committed the worst degree of crime, and told him how to solve his sin problem. Cain was probably willing to listen to him. But he could not turn to God because of his sense of self-condemnation, which weighed him down heavily, so heavily. Cain knew that his future would be a succession of sufferings with a sense of guilt and punishment. So God guaranteed him safety. But Cain could not believe God's promise because he was a slave of self-condemnation. Likewise, Satan does his best to cause us to fall into self-condemnation all the more, so that we are not able to keep up our faith in Jesus. Therefore, we must firmly believe that there is now no condemnation when we believe in him.

Second, Christians are spiritual men (5-11). There are two kinds of people. The first kind is physical men. They think according to their sinful nature. They act according to their sinful desires. Those who say they are Christians but who do not bridle their unclean lips or control their sinful thoughts are not God's children. To physical men troubles and distress always follow, as a shadow follows a tree. Physical men cannot please God (8). The second kind is spiritual men. Spiritual men are those who control their minds by the Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus. The Spirit of Jesus is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes when we believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus. This is a biblical constant. Whatever they think or do, spiritual men do in Jesus; they control their thought world completely in the limit of the Bible teachings. Look at verse

6. "The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace..." Spiritual men are those who believe in Jesus' death and resurrection.

Third, our spiritual man grows when we believe Jesus' death and resurrection. Look at verse 11. "And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you." From time to time we wonder whether we are spiritual men or physical men. According to verse 11, we are spiritual men when we believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus. It's because when we believe his death and resurrection, the Holy Spirit works in us and helps us grow spiritually until we can get out of the gravity of sin and plunge into the spiritual world. Moreover, we grow spiritually because our spiritual man, by the help of the Holy Spirit, longs for the word of truth and yearns to please God.

Not only so, but we also can overcome our inner fears. When we believe in Jesus' death and resurrection, the Holy Spirit comes and dwells in our hearts and drives out the spirit of fear, Satan, who made us fearful all the time. Read verse 15. "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.'"

Fourth, heirs of God. The most remarkable thing is that we can have the assurance that we are the children of God, and that we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. When we have this blessed assurance, nothing can be a problem to us. Read verses 16,17. "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory." This is the glorious faith that fills us with a glorious hope that cannot be exchanged with anything. People are so ambitious that most people have a vision of world conquest. In history, there have been innumerable heroes and heroines who had attempted world conquest. But most of them turned out to be people who chased rainbows. Human hopes are no more than a chasing after the wind. When we believe in Jesus' death and resurrection, we can obtain the kingdom of God. Also, we become heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. This is our glorious faith.

II. The glorious hope (18-27)

Read verse 18. "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." Through Jesus, we have a living hope of the kingdom of God in our hearts. Paul speaks of present sufferings because the world still has not been restored to its former perfect state: Man and nature suffer until the day of complete redemption by God. Even though we have much suffering to overcome at the present time, we can rejoice in our sufferings because our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. Human hopes are based on a certain amount of reward or punishment. But our glorious hope is based on the kingdom of God. At the present, our Christian faith is that all creation will be fully redeemed and restored so that we can see God's work of complete redemption. Paul makes impact on several things.

First, the creation waits (19-22). Read verse 19. "The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed." "The creation" means the natural world, including men and animals and trees and everything in the universe. According to verse 19, all nature waits eagerly for the time when the children of God will be revealed in glory through his redemption. Here, the "sons of God" are Christians. Why does creation wait so eagerly? All of nature, including all the trees and all the animals, was cursed as the consequences of man's sin (Ge 3:17). Oxen and pigs and chickens, cursed by man's sin, groan with sorrow because they don't belong to the children of God, but have been subjected to frustration, not even by their own choice. They are sorry when they are not eaten by God's children, but by ungodly people. The whole creation is still suffering the pains of childbirth (22), because it has been subjected to frustration and decay, and to the power of Satan. But all creation eagerly longs for the day of liberation, in which it can serve the children of God freely (21).

Second, our faith in the adoption as sons (23). Look at verse 23. "Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." Even Christians, the fruits of the Holy Spirit, groan--not outwardly, but inwardly--while they are waiting eagerly for adoption as sons, because they are still living in a real world and see around them the abominable people that cause desolation by standing where they should not stand (Mk 13:14). They also hear about wars and rumors of war. There are constant tragic reports in the newspapers.

Here, "adoption as sons" had a special meaning in the Roman world. People in Roman satellite countries eagerly wanted to obtain Roman citizenship. Many brilliant and promising young people from satellite countries were adopted into aristocratic Roman families, and shared the privileges of their citizenship. Many long and tedious legal procedures were necessary in order to complete this adoption. During the period between election and adoption, they eagerly waited for the day of their adoption ceremony. Christians are like elected adoptees, waiting for the day of adoption in the heavenly kingdom. This is our Christian faith that we will be adopted as sons in the kingdom of God.

Third, the glorious hope (24,25). Look at verse 24a. "For in this hope we were saved." Although we suffer much because we live as Christians, we are saved in the hope of future glory. And moment by moment we are saved because of this glorious hope that God will complete his salvation work, and that we will be his heirs and co-heirs with Christ. We who have a glorious hope in the promises of God, hope that he will fulfill his whole salvation plan, including the restoration of each leaf of each tree. Still there are many so-called Christians who crane their necks to see the things of the world. So Paul says in verse 24b, "But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has?" It is true that worldly hope cannot be real hope, because the things of the world perish, spoil and fade away in the matter of time. Anyone who has fulfilled his or her hope must experience something that follows his success or achievements, such as the enormous amount of taxes he must pay, and the nerve-wracking tension of maintaining his position. Moreover, after success, despair comes. But if we have hope in God and in his kingdom, we must wait for it patiently (25).

Fourth, the glorious salvation plan of God (18-25). When we read verses 18-25 carefully, we can find the greatness of God's salvation plan. We don't know how wonderful God's salvation plan is. This salvation plan is beyond comparison. Buddha's treatise on salvation is the best among worldly philosophers. However, he did not say anything about how to solve man's sin problem or about the way of man's salvation. He suggested that man can be saved through good deeds done in suffering and begging. He said in his theory in "Samsara," that man cannot come back as a man again because man is the best being in the course of transmigration; when a man does his best, he can live again at best as a dog, or otherwise as a snake or some other animal or insect. He saw human life as having the same value as animal life with no difference. But God gave us the way of salvation. God gave us his promise of adoption and of the day of redemption, even the redemption of nature and animals.

We have the hope of a glorious future. Still, we are living in the body in this world, and we are weak human beings. Sometimes we are torn between faith and doubt. Sometimes we don't know what to pray or how to pray (26). But by the help of the Holy Spirit, we can pray in accordance with the Lord's prayer. "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come..." We must diligently pray for God's salvation work and history. We must pray earnestly for the day of future glory to come soon, and we must eagerly wait for it. We don't need to worry about anything, for the Holy Spirit intercedes for us in accordance with God's will.

III. The victorious life (28-39)

First, God is good (28). Look at verse 28. "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." This verse reminds us of the beautiful life of Joseph. This is also Paul's personal testimony. This verse should be the testimony of all the saints who love God. Our Christian assurance is that God works for the good of those who love him. On the contrary, without God human beings are all but accidents and tragedies. Though man is not culpable in anything; but if there is no God, men turn out to be nothing but accidents and tragedies. Shakespeare's concept of beauty was tragedy. He wrote many humanly tragic stories in order to praise the beauty of humanity. But his tragic stories stop in the adumbration of comedy. His description of man is always a kind of mixture of the tragedy and comedy of a miserable person. But in God we have a glorious hope that we will be heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. There is no accident in God. Each person has a fatalistic element of life. But we Christians must believe God's presence with us and we also must love God in any situation. Our faith in God changes our bitter fate into the providence of God.

I cannot miss Dr. Codington's story. He was a missionary to Korea. He worked hard for the sick and poor children in a Christian hospital in Kwangju, Korea. One summer day Philip, his youngest son, drowned. His Christian friends and the ministers who knew him wondered why such a thing happened to a man who had so dedicated himself to God's work. No one dared perform the funeral ceremony of his son, for no one could find adequate words to comfort Dr. Codington. Then Dr. Codington stepped out from among the mourners and said, "There is no accident with God. God is good." (28, Ps 135:3)

Read verses 29,30. "For those God foreknew he also predestined to

be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified." These verses are often misunderstood in theology and philosophy because of the ambiguity of the word "predestined," a word that has been used as a good excuse for men's misdeeds or fatalism. Here the word "predestination" does not mean, as some worldly philosophers say, that the evil are doomed to be evil, the good are doomed to be good. Predestination simply means that God prepared the world salvation plan beforehand. In these verses we find the words "justified" and "glorified." These words indicate that God predestined in his sovereign will to justify and glorify his children, saving them from their sins. For example, God called Abraham from his life of sin so that he could grow in the image of God, until he could glorify God and be a blessing to others. The same is true of us. If we are justified, God wants us to grow in the image of his Son Jesus until we can glorify God and be a blessing to others. We call this growing in the image of God, "sanctification." Plainly speaking, God wants to restore our images to the original image that he created, for the image of God in us has deteriorated because of Satan's work.

Second, God is on our side (31). Look at verse 31. "What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?" Verse 31 tells us by implication that the world is a spiritual battleground. It also tells us that there are victors and losers in life. Through studying Romans, we learn that God eagerly wants us to be victors in life through Jesus. On the other hand, Satan's attacks are so fierce that we can hardly survive spiritually.

What can we do to survive spiritually? And how can we be victors in life? Look at verse 32. "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" Paul teaches the secret of victory. It is to believe God's love absolutely, acknowledging that God gave us everything when he gave his one and only Son for our sins. If God is for us, who can be against us? No one can condemn us or be against us (34). From time to time we feel very lonely. We feel Christians are an absolute minority, and enemies of God seemingly are an absolute majority. But it is not so. God is for us, therefore we are an absolute majority and no one can be against us. No one condemns us. Christ Jesus, who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

Look at verse 35. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?" Paul's spiritual battle was so fierce, as a matter of life and death. Look at verse 36. "As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.'" This verse is a quotation of Psalm 44:22. It indicates indirectly how great was Paul's suffering in his spiritual battle with Satan. Read verses 37-39. These verses tell us that there was no defeat for Paul, but only victories when he believed that Christ Jesus was on his side. Paul was also filled with the spirit of a conqueror when he believed that Christ Jesus was on his side.

We learned that Christians are spiritual men. We also learned that our glorious hope is that the day of complete redemption will come soon. In short, our glorious hope is the complete redemption by God, and to

become heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ through adoption as sons. We also learn that we Christians are victors in life, never losers in life. May God bless you with the glorious hope.