

Children of God in a still-suffering world

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Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] Well, let's turn to Romans chapter 8, and this second half of the chapter, all about what it means to be children of God in a still-suffering world.

The questions posed in verses 33 and 34 of this chapter are very real and pertinent ones, aren't they, for any real Christian who will bring a charge against us?

Who is to condemn us? And the answer, of course, is that a great many people do, and a great many situations will do, and continue to do so.

Not least, if we're people who are honest at all about our own sins and failings, not least our own hearts. We live constantly battling the enemy of our sinful nature within, and the many pressures that come to us from without, living as we do in a still-suffering world.

And so, often we find ourselves in perplexity and in pain, and with doubts and perhaps sometimes near despair. And often we do feel guilty, and we feel condemned.

[1 : 20] And so naturally we seek for comfort and strength in the midst of these kind of feelings of frustration and agony.

And we long to be rid of these struggles. We long to have peace and relief. We long to have that now. So I was pondering these things this week.

My mail came in, and there was one envelope which had in big block letters on the outside of the envelope these words, Satisfy all your wants and needs. Well, I thought, maybe this is the answer. So I opened it up. Inside was a letter which began like this, Dear Mr. Philip, Have it all, and have it all now. He was trying to sell me a brand new Mazda sports car.

And the brochure was full of excitement and innovation about the amazing spec of this great vehicle. How affordable it was. Although the actual price was in very, very small print, somewhere right down at the bottom.

[2 : 26] Have it all, and have it all now. Well, alas, that is what a great deal of modern Christian thinking seems to suggest, that we can have.

So much Christian vocabulary today displays that. Lots and lots of talk about celebration, but a great deal less talk about cost and consecration.

Lots of talk about finding self-fulfillment, but not nearly so much about self-denial. Lots and lots of talk about singing, but not very much talk at all about suffering.

But as I looked at that letter from the Mazda garage, I turned my eyes back to the other letter on my desk, from the Apostle Paul to the church at Rome.

And I found in that letter a very different message indeed. Yes, it does promise satisfaction.

Abundantly more than you can ever imagine.

[3 : 30] Much more, in fact, is the strapline of Paul through this letter, as we've seen. You can have it all, says Paul, and indeed you do have it all. You are heirs, he says, in verse 17, of God himself.

You are fellow heirs with Christ. But, he says, you cannot have it all and you do not have it all now. Not yet.

And what's more, if you look at verse 17 very carefully, you'll see that he says we shall be glorified with Christ and have it all provided we suffer with him.

Yes, says verse 18, the present time is a time marked by suffering. Suffering with Christ and suffering for Christ.

And that's because, as we've seen again and again in this letter, the truth of the gospel is that although we are in Christ, new creations, we must live out that new life of the Spirit that is ours now.

[4 : 37] We must live it out in this old creation until the day of our resurrection. When, as verse 11 tells us, we will at last receive, instead of these bodies of death, bodies of resurrection life, just like the Lord himself.

We are sons of God, says Paul, verse 14. We are led by the Spirit, but, as we saw last time, the same Spirit who makes us conscious of our sonship is the Spirit who leads us into conflict with sin and into, as verse 17 says so clearly, into the crucible of suffering.

That's a very important point for Paul to make, by the way, as he writes to this church in Rome on his way to visit them, a church he's never yet met. Because Paul's own life and ministry was surrounded by just that kind of suffering and opposition.

All the things that we read of in verse 35, these tribulations, all of these had happened to Paul's own personal experience. Just read the book of Acts, read 2 Corinthians to see that.

And because of that, many, even Christians, had distanced themselves from Paul. They'd abandoned him. Because decent people, respectable Christians, well, they don't want to be associated with rebels and people they'll look down on.

[6 : 08] But no, says Paul, persecution, distress, tribulation, these things are the genuine mark of a Spirit-filled life and a Spirit-filled ministry.

And that's just as relevant today as well. Real gospel churches and real gospel Christians heading for glory with Christ will be so and will be heading for glory provided they're prepared to suffer with him now at the hands of a world that hates the Lord Jesus Christ.

And all too often at the hands of a religious establishment that itself loves itself and its traditions more than it loves the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we also need to remember that. Well, that all sounds very grim, doesn't it? It sounds rather depressing. Is there no hope? Can this faith possibly be worth it if there's so much suffering, if there's so much struggle to be born?

Well, Paul answers that question with an emphatic yes. And it comes resolutely there in verse 18. Do you see? But notice what he says and what he doesn't say. His answer is not, yes, it is worth it because there are so many joys in the Christian life that that will outweigh the sorrows in the Christian life now.

[7 : 34] He doesn't say it's worth it because on balance the glory eclipses the suffering now. That may be so. That very often is so.

But what he actually says is this, verse 18. I consider that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed in the future.

Our present trials, he says, may never ever be compensated for by present glory. But they shall certainly be more and abundantly more than compensated for by the future victory that is ours when the glory of God himself is revealed in us.

In what he calls the revealing of the glory of the sons of God. And that is the sure and certain hope in which we are saved, says Paul. And that perspective alone is what can comfort and strengthen us in the midst of the present realities of life that so often simply do not satisfy our desires and our wants and needs.

And in fact never can. No matter what the car salesmen of the commercial world tell us. Or even the spiritual salesmen of much of modern Christianity. What they want us to believe.

[8 : 58] The Christian faith of the Bible is all about the future. That's where our full salvation belongs.

And unless we're really clear, unless we have a biblical perspective on the past and the present in the light of the future, friends, we will never be able to live with the harsh realities of this present world.

You'll either have to pretend away that reality of life as it really is, with all its suffering and evil. Or else, in seeing it, it will likely drive you to despair.

But no, the way of true Christian faith is to know the truth of what Paul says in another place in 2 Corinthians 4, verse 17. That this light and momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

And in one verse, as it were, that is summing up what Paul is saying in the second half of Romans chapter 8. But how do we know that that's really true?

[10 : 08] Well, we can be sure, says Paul, for three reasons. Because we can see the groaning of the cosmos, which is waiting for that glory.

And because we know the goal of God's eternal covenant, which is working for that glory. And, he says, because we have the guarantee of the cross that has already won for us that glory.

So let's look at these things then. First of all, look at verses 19 to 26. How can we be sure that the glory to come is so great, so surpassing, that it makes the suffering of the present time worth while. Well, we can be assured, says Paul, because we witness the groaning of the cosmos in our present experience. All things.

All things is a prominent phrase in the second half of Romans 8. It's there in verse 28 and verse 32 and again in verse 37. What verses 19 to 26 are telling us is that all things are waiting eagerly for the glory of the sons of God.

[11:24] And so all things in this present age are touched by groaning, by the longing for the more that must come if all things at last are going to be right.

So verses 19 to 22, first of all, tell us that the whole creation waits, groaning. Waiting, says verse 19, for the revealing of the sons of God.

That is, their revealing in power and glory for their true destiny. Their destiny. As gracious overlords of the whole creation in the image of God himself. What we were created for.

The whole created order, says Paul, is frustrated. It's waiting, groaning for that liberation. It's not free, says verse 21. It's in bondage to decay.

And the reason for that is that it has been cursed. It was subjected to futility, says verse 20, by God himself. Not willingly on the creation's part, but helplessly as a result of the sin, the rebellion of man.

[12:29] Do you remember Genesis 3, verse 17? Cursed is the ground, said God to Adam, because of you. The whole created order does not flourish in freedom.

It labors in futility. Because man has rebelled against God and brought chaos to this world. The whole environment is ruined because of man.

See, even animal life and plant life, the whole environment, needs proper care and management.

There's something terrible, isn't there, when you pass in the countryside, a farm, that you can see, just by looking at it, is being looked after by a neglectful tenant farmer.

The fields are full of weeds in among all the crops. The walls, the broken down, the hedges are overgrown. There's rusting machines lying about all over the place. And you see the animals in the field, emaciated and looking miserable.

The whole farm, as it were, is groaning, longing for a proper farmer to come and put everything right. And that's the way it is with the world, says Paul in verse 22.

[13:38] The whole creation is groaning in pain like childbirth. And yet, with the expectancy of something more, something better, something to release it for what it ought to be.

And this universal groaning, this inconsolable longing, the unappeasable want of all creation, as C.S. Lewis called it, it's evidence that there must be more and better, that this world is not as it's meant to be or as it was created to be.

Isn't that how somebody has put it? Account for it as you may. A wail of sorrow pervades the universe.

The wind, coursing along, moans in every tree and mourns around every corner. Go to the seaside and every wave dies with a groan. Listen to the blackbird. Whilst there's unutterable sweetness in his whistle, yet underneath all his notes there is an undertone of sadness.

There's not a bird in the forest which doesn't touch a minor key. Hear the bleating of the land and note therein a tremor of sorrow. Ascend up to man and suffering dominates his history.

[14:53] Everything in nature seems abortive. Nothing seems to realize its destiny, achieving the full purpose of its creation. When man fell, nature grew sick.

All things are groaning, says Paul, waiting for something more. And the echoes of that groaning pervade the whole world of human life and history and culture also in the expression of the artists, the poets, the writers, the philosophers, the composers.

Some of you I saw last night where I was at the music hall listening to some of the great romantic classics. Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff, the haunting, the searching, the unappeasable want, palpable in their music.

The existentialist philosophers of the 20th century, they saw this futility. They were deeply conscious of it. That's why their writings were so bleak, so dark.

But they had no hope, only despair, crushed by the futility of this world. Many human beings do have hope, but it's hope that's totally confused and wrong and it'll only disappoint.

[16:12] So the environmental movement, for example, has so much about it that is right. It senses the groaning of our creation, pollution, destruction of the environment, exploitation caused

by greed, by the thoughtlessness of human beings, cursed because of us.

That's biblical. And all this talk about climate change, if it is man-made, well, it shouldn't surprise us. Man is a curse upon this world.

And yet, it's also terribly wrong because it puts hope for the cure of these things in absolutely the wrong place. Either that man himself can be the cure, that we can fix it, extraordinary hubris of government leaders meeting to decide that the earth's temperature will not rise in the next decade by more than two degrees.

You can't help but think of King Canute, can you? Sitting there, telling the tide not to come in. Or on the other hand, there are those who look for the cure in eliminating man, so that the earth and nature can flourish as it ought to without man at all.

The idolatry of nature worship. But no, says the Bible, the real hope, the real hope that God himself gives to this cursed world, verse 21, lies in the freedom of the liberation of the whole creation that will come only with the revealing of the glory of the sons of God in the consummation of the salvation that is theirs in Christ Jesus.

[17:54] That day and that day alone will bring the restoration and the consummation of all things. And it will do so in such glory that the present sufferings will be eclipsed, will be utterly forgotten forever.

But it's not just creation that's groaning and waiting, verses 23 to 25. The whole church waits, groaning, longing for more to come.

Sometimes Christians think to themselves, don't we, life's so hard, I've got such a struggle with sin, there's so much hardship in my life, maybe, maybe I'm not really a proper Christian at all.

Maybe I'm lacking something. There just seems to be so little power from the Holy Spirit in my life. I just don't have that permanent grin like the grin on the faces of those people in the big adverts for the course on Christianity.

Not grins with me, it's groans with me. There's something wrong. But look at verse 23. Paul says that that groan is the genuine mark of the Spirit-filled life.

[19:11] It's because you have the Holy Spirit that you do groan. Because of the fullness of the Spirit in this age, friends, is only ever the firstfruits.

It's not the fullness that will come only at last with our full adoption, with the redemption, the resurrection of our bodies. Paul says the same thing in 2 Corinthians chapter 5.

You can read it later. He speaks about our present experience as being like living in a tent, waiting and groaning for our permanent home in our resurrection bodies. It's rather like that TV program, Grand Designs.

I'm sure you've seen it. And often what's happening is that the people who are building this extraordinary house to dwell in are living in a caravan in the midst of a dreadful building site. And you see as things play out, as the edifice of the new building becomes more obvious, the frustration of living in that cramped caravan grows greater and greater and greater.

[20:12] And so it is with a Christian. We can see the future. But our present temporary state becomes more and more frustrating the more we see of that.

And that's us, says verse 24. In hope we are saved. We don't see it yet. It's not our possession yet, but we know it's certainly coming. And so as verse 25 says, there is an inevitable paradox and tension about our lives.

We wait. It's wait eagerly. It's the same word as there in verse 23. We wait eagerly and yet we must wait patiently with enduring patience.

Eagerly but patiently. How can that not be inducing of tension in us? With steady patience we maintain an eager expectation is how one translator puts it.

You see, it's the genuine Christian believer who knows the tension and frustration of having tasted the first fruits and longing for the fullness but having to wait with enduring patience.

[21:27] Waiting by faith not yet by sight. But friends, that very tension that we feel that makes us grow and inwardly and constantly it may seem.

That is the very guarantee of this surpassing glory to come. Groaning marks not the absence of God's Spirit in us but His presence in power in our lives causing us to long more and more for the home that He is fitting us for.

Let's make it in verse 26 where we're told explicitly that even the Comforter, the Spirit Himself waits, groaning, longing for the more that is to come.

Likewise, verse 26, the Spirit helps us in our weakness and indeed in our present frustration and our wretchedness in these bodies of death. We're so weak, says Paul, we can't even pray properly. The Spirit must do our praying for us with wordless groanings. Think of that. The Spirit of Christ Himself groans within us as He has to wait, wait to bring us to perfection, to perfect His work in us, to liberate us into our resurrection bodies.

[22 : 47] It's rather like a driving instructor sitting in the car with a novice driver. If ever there was a career that needs patient endurance, surely that must be it, don't you think? I couldn't do it.

Constantly there with this novice driver having to resort to the dual controls because they don't know what they're doing. And He groans quietly to Himself. I will get you through that driving test. But boy, oh boy, there's a long, long way to go. That's God's Holy Spirit within us. Just as the Lord Jesus, as the second person of the Trinity, became incarnate and took upon Himself the likeness of sinful flesh and suffered for us and for our salvation before He entered His glory, so also, in a sense, the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, incarnates Himself in us and dwells alongside our sinful and still decaying members and suffers with us, groaning likewise as Jesus groaned, as He works to bring us home to glory in our resurrection life.

And all this, friends, the evident groaning of the whole creation and all Christians and even the Holy Spirit Himself groaning is abundant evidence that God's cosmic purpose is not yet consummated in the glory that He's purposed for it.

All creation is shouting there is more. Every Christian longs for more. And the Spirit Himself intercedes to lead us to more.

[24 : 41] To the completeness in Christ which shall be ours at last. But how how can we who are so weak and can't even pray properly?

How can we be sure that we will endure with patience and make it to that glory that lies ahead? Well, we can be absolutely sure, says Paul in verses 26 to 30, because we know the goal of the covenant from all eternity.

Not only are all things waiting eagerly for the glory of the sons of God, but all things are working effortlessly for the glory of the sons of God, says Paul.

At the heart of this section is the famous verse 28. Do you see? All things work together for good. I'm afraid the truth is that this text is more often abused than understood.

Because so often it's plucked right out of where it belongs right here in a discourse about the harsh reality of our present sufferings in a world of sin and death. What that verse, friends, does not mean is what many well-meaning but rather crassly and sensitive Christians do mean when they quote it to people in the face of some disaster or some suffering.

[26 : 09] They say, oh, something good will surely come out of this. You'll see. Just wait. As though God is a God who makes sure that everything he does serves my will and my assessment of what something good must be.

That's not what this verse means. What it really means is that even these things, these very afflictions, these frustrations, these groanings in our lives that he's talking about, these groanings in the whole world, even these things must serve God's sovereign purpose, which is to bring his chosen ones to what is his ultimate goal.

That is, the glory of being conformed, he says, to the image of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's the last word of this paragraph in verse 30, glorified.

And that is the goal of God's eternal covenant promise in Christ Jesus. And all the sovereign power and purpose of the triune God is at work to that end from all eternity.

It's all God's doing. It's none of us are doing. And that's why we can be sure and certain that it will never disappoint us. It's God's eternal purpose. And Paul shows us two sides of the outworking of God's unbreakable covenant promise in these verses.

[27 : 38] The view from our own experience, the Spirit's prayers shaping our destiny within us, and the view from eternity, God's sovereign purpose shaping our destiny from without.

Verses 26 and 27 speak of the Holy Spirit's prayers shaping our experience. We're weak, says verse 26. That's obvious. But we're far, far weaker than we realize.

Even our prayer life is feeble. It's ignorant. But the Spirit helps us. He comes right alongside us and does what we can't do, just like the instructor in the dual-control car.

We don't know what to pray for. We're lost. We have no sense of direction about what God is doing in our lives and in the world. Especially in trouble and affliction.

Our natural instincts are to pray, Lord, get me out of here. Lord, take this difficulty away. But he takes over the Spirit, quietly doing what really needs to be done.
[28 : 41] Wordlessly, as verse 26 says. It's like a look between good friends or between spouses. Don't need any words. Just a look, but a slight raise of the eyebrow.

You know exactly what's being said. And so the God who searches hearts knows His Spirit's prayers. And the Spirit knows the will of God the Father.
And so the prayers we need to be answered are answered by God according to His will for our lives. But what is God's will for our life?
That's a big question, isn't it? We're often asking ourselves that, especially as young Christians. Well, here's the answer. What is work for us in answer to the prayers that come from our deepest hearts by the Holy Spirit Himself?
The answer is laid out in verses 28 to 30. Paul gives us God's will in terms of His sovereign purpose that is shaping all eternity for our good.
[29 : 49] And His will is that all who are His should be made like His Son and brought safely and securely to glory through all these things.

Let me ask some questions. What is His purpose? Verse 29. That those He foreknew, that is, who He entered into a deep relationship with in all eternity, that these same He predestined, that is, He declared a purpose for them.
And these, every one of them, verse 30, He called, that is, effectively, in time and history. He drew them to Himself, to true faith.
And every one of these, He says, He justified, He declared them right with God. and therefore, He has already glorified.
That is, although we await in time that experience of glory, it is as good as done. Because that is the unshakable sovereign purpose of God from all eternity.
[31 : 02] It's the goal of His covenant. It's the reason, indeed, why He created the whole universe. It's that certain. How is His purpose achieved?

Verse 28, Through all these things. Not despite them, not around them, but such is the all-encompassing sovereign power of God that every affliction, every rebellion, every evil and opposition, every rejection of God by the heart of man and by the devil himself can never hinder His purpose.
Rather, these things are taken up to fulfill and to forward His eternal purpose. That's the astonishing thing, the wonderful, the consistent story of the Holy Scripture is that God effortlessly turns even the rankest evil on its head and causes it to serve His glorious good.
Genesis chapter 50, do you remember? Joseph's wonderful words to his brothers. You meant it for evil, but God, He meant it for good, for the saving of many lives.
Think about the greatest evil that this world has ever seen. The killing of the Son of God Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ. And yet, though His enemies meant great and powerful evil, all those terrible things even, were the very things that worked glorious salvation for His people.
[32 : 48] God uses all these things to work ultimate good and glory for His own. Friends, that means that even when trials and great evils come upon our lives, these things even, these things may have come in answer to the prayers of the Spirit of God Himself from deep within our hearts for our good to bring us to ultimate glory, never to ultimate harm.

Is that possible to believe? Well, it must be if we consider why. Why God has this eternal sovereign purpose?
It is, says verse 29, that all His people might be conformed to the image of His Son. God has chosen us to be like Him, not only in sharing His crown of glory, but to do so as the humble, obedient, servant, Savior did Himself.
by being shaped for the crown by His cross. The glory, you see, of the exalted Son of God is inextricably linked up and tied up with His humble obedience to suffering even to death on a cross. Therein is His glory. As we've seen in Revelation, it's the glory of the Lamb who was slain. And so there's no shortcut to share in that glory.
[34 : 22] So sharing His suffering now, as verse 17 makes so clear, we suffer with Him in order that we may be glorified with Him. But God's eternal purpose is that heaven should be filled with the glory of His Son and many who are made like Him.

And notice there are many in verse 29. Many brothers, not few brothers. Some people object to this doctrine of predestination as though it means that few only could be saved. As though it limited the possibility of God to do good for human beings.

Absolutely, on the contrary, says Paul. Only God's sovereign purpose gives us any hope that any could possibly be saved. brothers. And here it is abundantly clear, He shall have many brothers. There shall be a multitude that no man can possibly number in glory before the throne of those who are made like the Lord Jesus Christ. That's why we can preach the good news with confidence. It's God's eternal purpose. It's certain. One more question. Who? Who are these who are called to His purpose?

[35 : 34] Whom He foreknew and predestined and justified and glorified. Sometimes people are fearful, aren't they? Maybe you are. You wonder, how can I know if I'm really one of those?

If I'm really called? Can it be true when I know how feeble that I am? Look carefully, very carefully at verse 28.

How does Paul describe those here speaking about? Again, he does it from two angles. One eternal, the other in our experience. They're those who are called according to His purpose.

But who are they? They're those who love God. That is in the context of this whole letter of Romans, those who rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

As chapter 5, verse 11 says, How can I be sure this is certainly for me? Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ?

[36 : 40] Such a simple question, isn't it? But so, so revealing. Quite a different question from this. Oh, are you a Christian? Or, oh, what do you believe? You can get all sorts of answers that mean almost nothing to those questions.

But ask somebody, do you love the Lord Jesus Christ? And their answer, even the look on their face, will tell you everything you need to know. A brand new Christian can say that, can't they, with joy.

A child can say that with great clarity and feeling. Somebody who's got all kinds of mental handicaps can know that, even though they may know a very little else in Christian theology.

If anyone loves me, said the Lord Jesus, my father and I will come to him and make our home with him. It means forever.

Do you love the Lord Jesus? It's the key question. It's the only key question. Do you remember, the Lord asked it three times to Simon Peter, Simon, do you love me?

[37 : 49] Do you love Jesus? Well, if the answer is yes, then whether you're a Jew or a Gentile, whether you've had a long background in the Bible and the church or whether you've had none at all, whether you know a whole lot of theology or hardly any at all, then friends, God's sovereign purpose in shaping all eternity and his spirit's prayers are shaping your experience to bring you safe to glory and to make you like his son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Yes, you say, but what if I don't go on loving the Lord Jesus? So many things in life that seem to drive me to despair. What if I stumble and fall and lose my love for the Lord?

How can I be sure God won't reject me at the last? I would, I think, if I was God. You sometimes think like that? Especially when in your own heart you look in and you see so much you're ashamed of, so much that makes you feel unworthy.

I sometimes think that. And I can tell you, sometimes it's very difficult to come up into this pulpit and speak to you because if the glass all around this pulpit revealed not just my body but what was in my heart, you would never want me to be your pastor.

That's why my favourite verse I think in all the scriptures is 1 John 3 verse 20. Whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our hearts and he knows everything.

[39 : 34] Friends, that's what these marvellous verses at the very end of this chapter are teaching us because our assurance ultimately ignites not in our feeble love for the Lord Jesus but in his fearsome love for us.

we can have now and always absolute certainty because verses 31 to 39 tell us we have the guarantee of the cross of Christ in history.

All these things have been won eternally for us in the glory of the Son of God our Lord Jesus Christ the wonderful Saviour who loved us and gave himself for us.

You see how in these last verses Paul takes every eventuality that could drive us to despair cause us to lose hope and he shows us how we remain eternally secure in the future because of his great

love for us in the effectual salvation that we have in the past in the work of our Lord Jesus on the cross.

So verse 31 and 32 we're secure in the face of all adversaries. Who can be against us? Well nearly everyone was against Paul and his mission.

[40 : 49] And it will often seem to us as though we have many adversaries. Many arrayed against us if we're faithful to the Lord Jesus in a hostile world. Paul tells us that. Everyone who lives a godly life will be persecuted.

There will be many adversaries. But no says Paul no opposition can overcome those for whom he did not spare his own son. Verse 32 Having won our peace and our reconciliation with God much more will he not give us all things as he's promised in the glory of his son.

So fear not God is for you. His cross tells you that again and again and again. All the powers that are arrayed against you. All the powerful opposition to your faith among family friends, people at school, at work.

Against all powers is his everlasting power guaranteed through what he has won for us on the cross. We're safe in the face of every adversary.

Moreover, we're safe in the face of every accusation. None can charge us, verse 33. None can condemn us because the cross of Christ won victory for us.

[42 : 13] Jesus died, says verse 34. He was raised. He's glorified at God's right hand. He's interceding for us. That is the achievement of his blood shed on the cross intervenes and will ever intervene at the place of God's judgment throne.

Opposition from outside can never overcome us. Offenses deep within can never condemn us. isn't it how many sins so often that erode our assurance, make us think God can't accept us?

But no, against all penalty we are guaranteed his everlasting pardon in the death on the cross and in his resurrection for our justification. Even the things that have made you so ashamed this week.

Even the things which will make you ashamed again next week. God and then verses 35 to the end he tells us we are absolutely secure even in the face of all afflictions.

Paul knew all of this in his own experience as I have said. Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, all for Jesus' sake. Maybe he was warning the church in Rome because he knew that as they became more and more vibrant as an outgoing missionary church.

[43 : 39] They also would face more and more opposition and we need to take that seriously. So often it does seem as though God must have deserted us when we find ourselves in such distressing situations, such difficulties like a living death verse 36 describes, killed all the day long.

He takes that from Psalm 44, a psalm all about the perplexity, of those who love God and haven't broken faith with God but whose lives seem to be cursed by God because of what's happening, just as Job's life seemed to be cursed by God.

But no, that can never, ever be. No ordeal, however terrible, can ever separate us, past or present or future, from the glory that he's prepared for us in Christ.

No, verse 37, even in all these things, there it is again, these terrible, painful things, we are more than conquerors through him who, notice, not loves us, but loved us.

It's a reference again to the cross of Christ where he loved us and gave himself for us. That's how God demonstrates his love for us, said chapter 5, that Christ died for us.

[45 : 09] So, against all pain, we have his presence with us, guaranteed forever through his death on the cross. He who gave up his life for us can never, ever give up his love for us.

Isn't that precious to know when pain and perplexity comes in like a thick darkness all around you? When it feels like you're being slaughtered all the day long?

Maybe in the physical pain of illness, maybe in the emotional pain, the bereavement or mental suffering, or family or marriage traumas.

But so many of the things that in our lives seem to floor us in this world of sin and suffering and death. It's hard. It's hard being a child of God in a still suffering world, isn't it?

Yes, it is. Sometimes it is almost unbearably hard. But the sufferings of the present time are not worth comparing to the glory that is to be revealed in us, says Paul.

[46 : 25] The groaning of the whole cosmos tells us that the glory of his children must come. the goal of the covenant tells us what that glory is, that all God's children will be conformed to the likeness of his son, the Lord Jesus.

And the guarantee of the cross tells us that glory belongs to all whom he has loved, and he is called to love him forever and ever.

That means, friends, that we who love the Lord Jesus Christ can be sure and secure in the face of every adversity, and every accusation, and every adversary, even in the face of the sin that remains within us.

We can be sure of what verse 38 says, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Amen. Let's pray. Lord, in our weakness, how glad we are. We have your spirit to help us, to strengthen us, to speak your words to our hearts of assurance and grace, and to speak his words from our hearts in prayer to you, that in hearing and answering, you will surely and securely shape us for the glory that is to come, when we shall see him, and when we will be like him.

[48 : 28] Amen.