

96-07-19b

Okay, we're back from our break, and we're picking up here in Romans 8, verse 14. And we're going to pick up our pace here a little bit because we want to not bog down and lose sight of what Paul is talking about. We know he's talking about the Christian life.

We know that he is talking about the reality of the things that happen to us positionally at salvation. What does it mean to be in Christ? Sure, our eternal destination has changed, and certainly we're going to be raised on the last day no matter what. But that can have effects and should have effects now.

It ought to make a difference, being saved. It ought to make a difference, and we have such a great opportunity, and we get so distracted. So that's what he's talking about here, and he says that we can be led by the Spirit of God.

And in verse 14, as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. We can live as sons of God in this age. And when you think about the patriarchal society in Israel and what it meant to be a son of your father, you were a reflection.

You were the next generation of what that family and that clan and that tribe stood for. Jesus Christ has as one of his greatest titles, Son of David. And what does that mean? It means that they shared the same faith and the same love for God and the same desire to please God in this life.

And Jesus Christ was proud of that title and claimed that title of being a son of David. And what a tremendous honor for David, because he was such a great man of faith. But we have that opportunity to be, it's like it tells us, remember the verse where it says, but as many as received him in the first chapter of John, to them he gave the right to be called the sons of God.

And we have that right, but do we fulfill it? I think all of us have heard in the past the union with Christ and the church proper called the royal family. And the comparison is made. Do we live up to that standard? You can be a member of the royal household, but do you act like royalty? Do you think like royalty? Do you reflect to others that status? And that's what it means to really be a son of God.

That's what it means to really be in Christ. And a lot of times we've missed what Paul is talking about in Romans 8, because we go back to what is a true thing of being in Christ and of having the Spirit and so forth. But Paul is going beyond positional truth.

He's talking about the fulfillment and the full reality of these things making a difference in our daily life. And if we are led by the Spirit of God, we are truly sons of God. He says in verse 15, you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear.

And this is a reference back to the law of Moses. If you didn't adhere to the standard, if you transgressed, if you failed, there was a penalty. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.

There was a death penalty. There were monetary penalties. There were wrath in the form of a judicial penalty that came upon you if you transgressed the law.

Remember that great passage over in Hebrews, I think it's in chapter 11 or in chapter 13, where it says that you could perish under the law of Moses on the testimony of two or three witnesses. And that's what it's talking about. We don't live under the fear of penalty that we know we're going to fail, we know that we're going to fall short.

Instead, we have this great opportunity. We received a spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, Abba, Father. And that word, Abba, is a familiar term.

I like the fact that our translation leaves it in the original because I think it gets a little bit strange in some of the paraphrases when it says they'll substitute the word Daddy or something in there. And I think, for me at least, it makes me a little uncomfortable. But there is that idea.

This was the familiar form of the term that people used to talk to their earthly father. I think probably a more appropriate one would be like you have heard maybe in Europe or in generations past when people would say Papa and talking about their father. And it combined respect and affection.

It combined a close relationship with recognition that this was your father. And that's what that Abba signifies there. And we are not so familiar that respect or reverence has eroded.

But at the same time, it is a close, familiar family term. The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. Not all believers feel that.

Not all believers have that witness in their soul. We as believers can lose that sense of family. We can lose that sense of who we are in relationship to God.

And once again, it goes back to what we choose, what we set our mind on. How important is it to us to please our Heavenly Father? If it's very important, then the Spirit is going to be witnessing to us and we're going to have an instinctive relationship with God. We're going to have an instinctive need to turn to Him in good times and in bad times.

We think about our own family, whatever it may be. Some people have had various histories with their parents. And it's kind of a shame because God uses the illustration of father and child because generally speaking, through most of history, that has been something that you can turn to and talk about a closeness and a sense of security and of caring and so on.

And it's a shame that in our day and age, many people actually resent that analogy. I've had people come up to me and say, you know, I don't want to hear about that Heavenly Father

business because my father was terrible to me and abused me and so forth and so on. That's a whole different issue.

But the fact that the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. But there's a condition on that and we reviewed that last time, I think. If indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together with Him.

And we had a great study on this in Mark when Jesus said, if any man will come after me, if any man wants to end up where I end up, let him take up his cross and follow me. Let him go with me on the path that's going to lead to that destination. I think getting back to what we talked about before the break, a lot of times in Christianity, it's presented and almost pitched or marketed as here's the mountaintop that you'll live on if you come to Christ.

All your problems will be solved. There will be no valleys. You know, it'll be great and wonderful and so on.

And Jesus said, if you want to end up where I'm going to end up, which is glorified at the right hand of the Father and the King of the Millennial Kingdom and ruling and reigning and reflecting the glory of God, He said, take up your cross, which is a sign of rejection. It was a humiliating execution. It was embarrassing for your family.

It was humiliating to all of those who'd been associated with you if you ended up being crucified by the Romans. But even before His own death and when people didn't know what kind of death or even that Christ was going to die, He said, take up your cross. What did people think of in that day when they thought of a cross? They thought of men who had been convicted of crimes of various sorts, who had been stripped, who had been beaten.

And the reasons the Romans, why did the Romans use crucifixion? A Roman citizen was beheaded. It was considered to be an honorable death. It was quick.

It was relatively dignified, as dignified as an execution can be. But crucifixion was humiliating. You were elevated in the sight of the crowd with most or all of your clothing gone and left to die a slow, painful death.

You cried out. You were in agony. It was designed to be humiliating.

It was designed to serve as a warning and as a motivation for people to not be criminals. And that was a part of the death of a cross. And that's something we need to be reminded of when it says that Christ was willing to be obedient even unto death, the death of the cross.

It wasn't just death, and it wasn't just the pain and just the bearing of sins, but the humiliation and the degradation that was associated with that. And when Jesus said, if you want to end up where I am ending up in the favor of God, then take up your cross and follow me through the path that

leads there. And why is there that challenge? Why is there that requirement to walk that path, to do as it says here, and suffer with him? It is a test.

It's a manifestation of how deep our love for God goes, how deep our understanding of God's plan goes. Jesus told the people that he was teaching in his day, he said, anyone can love those who love you back. That's an easy thing.

The real test of love is to love those who don't love you, to love your enemy, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. Any pagan can be kind to people who are kind to you, but it's the love of God that loves the unlovely. It's the love of God that can empower and enable us to do good to those who are doing evil to us, to pray for people who have stabbed us in the back and done us incredible wrongs and have injured us emotionally or mentally in some way, have really done us wrong and maybe have damaged our reputation in the eyes of others and so forth.

To love and do good and pray in that area, that's the power of God set in the context of evil, set in the context of corruption, set in the context of everything that would make you think that it couldn't happen. And that's what we are called to in this world. This world is full of corruption, it's full of shortcoming, it's full of sin and evil and failure.

And to demonstrate the pursuit of eternal goals and the plan of God when everything is pulling us in the other direction is what we're called to do. Everything pulled Jesus in the direction away from fulfilling the plan of God. He was offered the crown without the cross by the God of this world, by Satan himself, and it was a legitimate offer.

He was tested, as the song says, he could have called ten thousand angels to destroy the world and set him free as he hung on the cross and people were jeering and spitting and making fun of the Son of God. And he would have been within his rights, and yet he didn't. He said, Father, forgive them, and it's such an incredible example for us because he did that in his humanity.

He did that with the very same power that we have. The Holy Spirit and the Word of God in his soul oriented Jesus Christ and his humanity to what was really important, and it was pleasing God and not worrying about what people said or what people thought or what other opportunities might be there. He had his eyes fixed on the joy that was set before him, and because of that he endured the cross, he ignored the shame, and now he's seated at the right hand of the Father.

That's what we're called on to do. And sometimes it's just flat, not easy. It's not easy to get our mind off the things of the world.

It's not easy to pull our thinking out of the common rut that we were born into and that we're surrounded by, but that's what we're called to. And that's why the Spirit is put in us to bear witness to us that we are citizens of the heavenly kingdom. There's a different life that we're supposed to be living, and it isn't involved in going out and doing a lot of things that meet

someone's external standard of righteousness.

It's our thought life. It's our attitudes, and we have to look at ourselves and recognize where our attitudes are falling short, and those are the areas where we need to change our mind and set our minds on the things of the Spirit. We may have areas where we get bitter.

Some of us can watch the news and just get bitter over the state of the nation and the decisions that are being made by people in government and so forth. Does that reflect the glory of God? Do we have our minds on the things of the Spirit when we're watching the news? If we don't, there's an opportunity. There's an area where we can change and have another part of the field start growing the crop that may be in relationship with spouse, it may be in relationship with family, it may be in relationship with co-workers, it may be parents with children or children with parents, whatever area it might be, none of us, I'm pretty safe in saying, none of us have a mental life where there are no areas where we can improve, where there's no, it's just all set, we're mature, where mental attitude sins are a thing of the past.

But have we become complacent? Have we looked around lately to say, where is it that I'm still falling short after all these years? Where is it, have I come to a place where compared to this time a month ago or a year ago, I really am basically the same person, I've made no progress, I fail in the same areas, I'm strong in the same areas. Have we stagnated? Have we grown all the fruit we're going to grow and now we're just coasting? It shouldn't be. Why are we still drawing breath? Why are we still in this world? Why are we still alive and in God's plan? Because there's opportunity.

There's room for growth. There's room for bearing fruit. And even if we find ourselves relatively free from pressure and free from challenge, that's the time that the ant stores up the grain and stuff that he finds in the summertime, because you can bet that if you're in a period that's free from challenge and free from adversity and free from pressure, it's for a reason.

And the ant gathers in the summertime because he knows wintertime is coming. Tells us that in the Proverbs, and that's what we need to do. If we find ourselves prospering, there are two places to look.

One is the prosperity test, that when things are good we forget about God. And the second is that we are given opportunities in prosperity to store up the word of God in our soul, to take advantage of the cessation of pressure and the cessation of challenge to renew and strengthen and revitalize ourselves in anticipation of another opportunity, another challenge, another test that will inevitably come. Jesus said, in this world you will have tribulation.

He didn't say you might. He didn't say some of you will. He said, flat out, you will have tests.

But there's no test that overtakes us, that hasn't overtaken someone else, so we don't have to think we're a special case. And with every test, there is a way of escape. And God provides that

way of escape in advance, and we need to store it up in advance.

Patty and I were watching a thing on fire safety a few months back, and showing all of these terrible things that happen when people have a fire, and they were saying, here's how you can be prepared. You can get fire extinguishers and have them ready. You can get one of these ladders that you can roll out of a second-story window.

Well, you don't know if or when a fire will come, but if it comes, are you prepared? Do you know what you're going to do? Have you told your children what to do? Do you have a fire extinguisher? Do you have a plan for when that adversity comes? The time to figure it out isn't when the house is burning down. You don't try to yell through the flames to your kids, here's where to go and what to do. That needs to be done in advance.

And that's a crude example, but that's what we need to do in our spiritual life. If we're not facing a current crisis, well, are we preparing for the unknown crisis? If Moses had gotten complacent as he was herding the goats, and hadn't continued his relationship with God, would he have been ready to lead the children of Israel out of bondage? If Joseph had gotten complacent in prison, would he have been ready to become second in command in the nation of Egypt? And for us as believers, whether or not we are called into a material, earthly situation of leadership or opportunity or ministry, it may be nothing more than the death, I say nothing more than, it can be pretty great to have the death of a spouse or the death of a loved one or some other adversity that overtakes us, a physical challenge that we didn't anticipate, could not foresee. What did we do when we had the chance to store up, when we had the chance to set our minds on the things of the Spirit and be nourished and built up and established in Christ, as we saw in our passages in the first session? And why is that? Paul says that the Holy Spirit is there to remind us that we are children of God, and because we are children of God, we are heirs.

We are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him. And you can either suffer with Christ or suffer apart from Christ. We're going to suffer in this life one way or the other, aren't we? In this world you will have tribulation, but what kind of tribulation is it going to be? You can suffer by yourself, you can suffer in discipline, you can suffer apart from God and apart from any opportunity to produce good, or we can suffer with Christ.

If we suffer with Christ, this is what we're going to see when we study 1 Peter, we'll hear before long, what is the nature and the purpose of suffering. If we suffer with Him, we may also be glorified with Him, glorified together with Him, and that fulfills our purpose. Paul says in verse 18, I consider that the sufferings of this present time, and this is the sufferings he talked about in verse 17, it's not just any old sufferings, it's the sufferings that we share with Christ.

It's persevering in seeing life from divine viewpoint when everyone around us is looking at it a different way. It's keeping eyes on the goal. We saw so many great examples of that when we went through the life of Christ, and Christ was in a town and flocks of people came to the

doorway, and the disciples thought, here's a great opportunity for ministry, and Jesus would be out in the early morning hours praying to His Father, and He would pack up and leave and go to another village, because He had His eyes on the goal.

He said, the reason I came is to teach, and these people, as many of them as there are, they're not here to hear teaching, they're here to see miracles, and I'm not here just to perform miracles, I'm here to communicate about my Heavenly Father, and He, in the face of a huge crowd, had evaluated that crowd and would move on. What evangelist and what pastor today would leave a big crowd, a ready-made audience? Very few of us have the viewpoint to do that, but that's the example of Jesus Christ. He took a lot of flack for it.

His disciples chewed Him out for leaving, for saying that He was going to die, and so forth, and of course got chewed out right back. I consider that the sufferings of this present time, these sufferings that we share with Christ, the opportunities that we have to think divine viewpoint in the face of challenge, these things are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. The earnest expectation of the whole creation, you can substitute the word universe here, because this is the created universe, the material world that everybody wants to set their minds on, the things of the flesh that we want to set our minds on.

This whole world, this entire universe eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. What kind of sons of God are we talking about? The sons of God up there in verse 14, those who are led by the Spirit of God. The creation isn't waiting for the revelation of every single believer, every single church age Christian.

The creation is waiting for the revelation of the sons of God, those who by faith have modeled their lives after the Son of God, who have fulfilled that opportunity to be in Christ and Christ to be in us. That's what the earnest expectation of the universe is. That's what the angels are waiting to see.

That's what all of creation is, in a sense, waiting to see, is the revelation of the glory of God reflected in the sons of God. The creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it with an expectation, in hope, because the creation itself will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. And all the way through here, when we're talking about sons of God and children of God, these are believers who fulfill the purpose of God.

A lot of us are going to have salvation, but not all of us are going to be sons of God in this sense, to be sons indeed, reflectors of the glory of God. That's what creation is waiting for. That's why God put the universe into existence.

It's amazing to walk out on a starry night and look up at the Milky Way and look at the stars and the planets, the moon, and to think all of this immensity, all of this great expanse was put in place so that the sons of God could reflect the glory of God. That's the whole purpose. That's why the

material universe is here.

What a shame to set our mind on earthly things and miss that opportunity. The creation itself will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole universe, the whole creation, groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.

Not only that, but we also, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves, groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. That day when Christ returns and we get that resurrection body and the glory of God is going to be reflected to a greater or lesser extent by the children of God, by the sons of God. We can go over and look at 1 Corinthians 17 where he talks about the resurrection and the star differs from star in glory even so shall it be in the resurrection.

Some of us are going to be dim bulbs and some of us are going to be bright reflectors of the glory of God. What determines that is the attitude that we have tonight and the attitude that we have tomorrow and the way we look at our life, the goals that we set for ourselves, the importance that we attach to pleasing God. How often do we sit down and evaluate ourselves with a harsh critical eye and say, am I in the faith? Am I living as a son of God? That will determine what kind of reflector we are.

And in verse 24, the same concept that we've seen in the first chapter of Galatians and here in Romans, we were saved in this hope. For this expectation we were saved. Jesus Christ died to deliver us out of this present evil age.

He saved us so that our life would make a difference, not just to get us out of the lake of fire, but so that we would live a life that reflects the glory of his Father. That's why he came and died. That was the joy that was set before him when he endured the cross.

We were saved in this hope. Hope that is seen is not hope. Why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, eye has not seen, ear has not heard, neither has entered into the heart of man the things that God has prepared for those who love him.

And that's our great challenge. That's our great opportunity in this age. If we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.

And that's what we're called to, to persevere. There is an element of challenge in this life, and we have to evaluate where we stand and where we want to go, and it's our choice. We are called to it, we owe a debt to God in this area, but ultimately it's up to us where we will stand.

Are we going to be one of those that are like the Israelites when Christ will look out the door and say, I never knew you? Where were you when the oil of the Spirit was being parceled out? Why did your lamp run out of oil? Why did you not respond to the ministry of the Holy Spirit? And this

is why in verse 26, the Spirit helps us in our weaknesses. We do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. He who searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because he makes intercession for the saints according to God.

And what is the Spirit praying on our behalf? Is he having to pray for the basic change of mind that is the beginning of our journey in this life? Is he still praying that we will change our minds away from dead works and learn how to operate in faith and what the value of faith is? Can he pray that we have more advanced opportunities, that we learn the finer and the more excellent things? What kind of prayer does the Holy Spirit pray on our behalf? Where do we stand? Are we still babies in need of milk and not solid food? Or can God the Holy Spirit go to God the Father and say, this believer is ready for the greater things, the higher things. This believer is ready to walk with Christ down that road that is going to lead to glory. Where do we stand? The Holy Spirit knows where we stand, and that is the basis of his prayers for us.

We do not know what kind of challenges to pray for. We generally pray that we will not have any challenges, and the challenges we do have, we pray that God will take them away. But the Holy Spirit knows where we are, and this life is built for challenge.

We are here for challenge. Without challenge, there is no grounds for faith, and without faith, there is no righteousness, because righteousness comes by faith. Faith is exercised in challenge, in adversity, under testing.

We keep praying that God will take these things away, but God the Holy Spirit prays for the right kind of challenge, for the challenge that we can face and pass. That is what he knows that we do not know. We do not know how to pray as we ought.

We are always praying, take the challenge away, give me peace, give me roses, give me the good life. But God the Holy Spirit is praying, give him this kind of challenge, give him this opportunity, put this level of adversity, put this stumbling block. Wouldn't it be great if we reached the level that Job reached, where God can put a great challenge in front of us, and we pass.

We are thinking about God the whole time. That is what the Holy Spirit prays on our behalf. Why does he pray that? This is all bound up in God's purpose for us, so that we can reflect the image of God and the glory of God and bear fruit for God in this life.

We are not our own. We have been bought with a price, and that is the challenge. How come we do not hear that in Christian media? How come we do not hear that in Christian circles? How come we do not hear that opportunity preached from the pulpit and put into books? When people have adversity, why don't we hear the opportunity to reflect the glory of God and bear fruit for God talked about? Instead, we are constantly given solutions to take the challenge away, solutions to make the pain go away or make the test go away, to make me feel better, to make me happier instead of making God feel better and making God happier with the way we live our

life.

That is the difference between a man-centered Christianity and a God-centered Christianity. And Jesus Christ came to be the way, the truth, and the life to enable us to come to the Father. That's the goal of our life, is to come to the Father, and when we come and stand before Him to be acceptable and to be good and faithful servants.

It is required in a steward that a man be found faithful. That's what God is looking for in us. Do we care enough? Are we motivated enough by what God has done for us to shake loose from the ruts that we surround our thinking in this life and pursue the opportunity that Christ died to give us, to be delivered out of this present evil age and bear that fruit? That's what Paul has spent seven and a half chapters now talking about.

Don't get tangled up in righteousness by works. Don't get tangled up in some other philosophy, some other way of living life. This is the opportunity to suffer with Christ so that we can be glorified with Him.

There is no other meaning in life. There's no other purpose in life that counts. But we have such a hard time seeing it and remembering it in the day-to-day challenges of life.

But this is material that God the Holy Spirit will take in our souls and remind us of in the days to come, and that should be our prayer. We know that that's the prayer of the Holy Spirit on our behalf. And He's present.

The Word of God is present with us, and we have nobody to blame but ourselves if we don't succeed in this area. God has given us the power. God has given us the resources.

Jesus Christ died for this, and it's now the only remaining stumbling block is how bad we want it. Are we challenged? Do we recognize the opportunity and the calling to which we have been called? We're going to see that here in the rest of Romans. We're going to see it when we do our next study, which as we finish Romans I think will be in 1 Peter.

And that's one of the things that Peter talks about, that this is the calling to which we've been called, to succeed in suffering, to have happiness in suffering, to do the weird thing, the strange thing, to prosper and have enjoyment and peace and happiness when anybody else looking in our circumstances would say, you've got to be the most miserable person in the world. Look at all of these terrible pressures and adversities. Look at what people have said.

Look at the circumstances that you're in. The power of God is manifest when in circumstances like that we are blissfully happy, and we have great peace, and we have great joy, and we recognize that our life partakes of a completely different plane of existence than what the world sees. That's the challenge that we have.

That's the opportunity that we have, and that's why God has given us His Spirit. We set our minds on that, and that can be fulfilled. Let's close in prayer.

Father, we thank you that you have chosen us, that we are elect in Christ, and we have been marked out for this great mission in your overall plan of the ages. And in this age, and with the standing that we have in Jesus Christ, with the resources that you have put at our disposal, the tremendous dynamic power of your Word, the divine power of the Holy Spirit in our souls, with the objective clearly marked out in the pages of Scripture, we pray that these things will challenge us, that God the Holy Spirit will make them real to us, that we will awaken from sleep, that we will see who we are and why we're here each day of our lives that remain to us here, and that we will fulfill the purpose for which Christ died, for which you saved us, for which you have entered us into your family and have called us by your name. We pray that we will, in fact, be your sons and daughters, that we will be your children, that we will reflect the glory of our Savior, Jesus Christ, both now and in the eternal future.

We ask these things in his name. Amen.