

Introduction:

- A. I've never forgotten a line I heard years ago by Zora Neale Hurston: ***"I have been in Sorrow's kitchen and licked out all the pots."*** Know anyone like that? I've felt lately that I've been surrounded by people in Sorrow's kitchen. A friend starting a new job wrote me, "I'm stepping into a rather unhealthy, messy environment, toxic even." I have another friend laid off from his church after 20 years of wonderful pastoral care. A dear couple whose little boy has been diagnosed with a rare genetic disorder. *Sorrow's kitchen*. Dear friends have died: June Griffin, Babe Johnson, Ted Ward, Chrissi's friend, Becky. *Sorrow's kitchen and licked out all the pots*. A friend wrote that they're son was being hospitalized for mental illness. I've talked to at least three people in the last couple weeks whose lives are scarred because of parents who failed them badly. Hardships like these are so destructive, so ruinous.

Except that all these people are Christians.

- B. **Turn to Rom. 8.** Last Sunday we learned from Rom. 8 that when we were saved the Holy Spirit brought about our adoption into God's family so that we are God's sons and daughters. **Rom. 8:17** says, *"Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and coheirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory."* What sufferings count? Paul actually catalogs what he means a few verses later. Look at **v.35**: *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall **trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?**"* I'd guess that whatever you're facing fits in one of those. **No matter what a Christian suffers the Holy Spirit assures us that our hardships are the birth pangs of glory.**
- C. This week we pick up on that phrase, "share in his sufferings." Sorrow's kitchen. The next verse, **v.18**, says, *"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."*

Vv.18-25... Here's the first thing I want to encourage you with:

I. WHEN WE SUFFER THE HOLY SPIRIT KINDLES OUR HOPE OF GLORY (8:18-25)

- A. We're not alone in our suffering. All creation groans with us over its "bondage to decay" brought on by human sin. When Adam and Eve sinned, God turned nature into a kind of fickle friend. Beautiful and bountiful creation, but also the suffering of childbirth and weed-infested hard labor. **Nature became God's tool to bring headstrong humans to our knees in weakness and need.** But ever since, **nature itself groans at this unnatural assignment.** What's more, all creation decays. We feel in the aches of our aging bodies what all creation feels.
- B. But there is hope for creation because creation's destiny is pegged to our own, and the destiny of believers in Jesus Christ is "freedom and glory." The Bible teaches that part of God's glorious plan is a new creation—not a new kind (like something out of Dr. Seuss) but the old creation with a new lease on life. Creation re-created as the new heavens and the new earth. Look again at v.22, "*We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.*" **Creation's groans are birth pangs not a death rattle.**
- C. The point of all this is that our suffering as Christians resonates with the groaning of creation itself, which waits to be brought with us "into the freedom and glory of the children of God." It is as though the convulsions of nature—the storms and droughts, the fires and floods, extinctions and epidemics—moan, "*This is not what we were meant for. When can heaven and nature sing again?*" And the answer comes back, "***When God brings his children home you will be their paradise.***"
- D. **Vv.22-23... The pangs of creation are linked here with our own as believers who suffer.** And that's where the Holy Spirit comes in. We "*have the firstfruits of the Spirit,*" which means that now we are experiencing just the early harvest of all that the Holy Spirit will give us. **He sees that our suffering is folded into our salvation; that our**

suffering is redeemed, put to eternal good and golden use. Chrysostom said, *“if the firstfruits [of the Holy Spirit] are enough to free us from our sins and give us righteousness and sanctification...consider how wonderful the whole inheritance must be. If creation, devoid as it is of a mind and reason...nevertheless groans, much more should we groan as well.”* [Osborne, 214] The Holy Spirit has created within us this craving—this groaning—to be finished with our adoption; to come home to the Father and to find these dying bodies rendered immortal. That is the great hope of the Christian and creation alike!

- E. So in our suffering we have these two great encouragers. Creation, whose hope is tied to ours, and the Holy Spirit who assures us in our own hearts, *“You are **born** again. You are **not** dying. These sufferings—so painful—are the birth pangs of your incomparable glory in Christ.”* **It is the Holy Spirit who is able to embed our sufferings in our hope.**

So... to come to the conclusion of **v.18** is a miracle: *“I consider our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”* Ted could tell you that. And Chrissi’s friend, Becky. And June and Babe... who have each and all stepped into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

Vv.26-27... Just as the Holy Spirit births our **hope** in suffering, he also brings us his **help**.

II. THE HOLY SPIRIT PRAYS WITH US IN OUR WEAKNESSES (8:26-30)

- A. Judging from **v.26**, when it comes to help in weakness what is the one thing that is most important for us to do? Pray. It’s the only thing mentioned here. Our crucial need when suffering weakens us is to pray well. Why? Because suffering and weakness disorient us spiritually. Suffering can sap faith and leave us grasping for spiritual straws. Suffering can bring out the worst in us so that we add sin to our troubles. What’s our first line of defense? Prayer!

- B. There's just one problem. We don't know what to pray for.
Illus.: Years ago a student pilot invited me to go flying with him. He was working on his instrument rating so he put on these weird glasses that blocked his sight out the plane's window and only allowed him to see the instruments. Even when we came in for a landing, I could see, but all he saw were the dials and readouts by which he flew and landed.

Prayer in times of suffering is kind of like learning how to fly blind because we don't know God's will. We can't see where we're going. What's God's will when sickness comes—healing or endurance? Is it God's will to give you a job or to teach you to trust him in ways you've never had to? How often have you puzzled over why you're going through some trial, or wondered what God is trying to do?

- C. In those times we need a prayer partner who is far better at praying than we are! And that's what we have in the Holy Spirit. V.26b-27... Did you notice that word, *groans*, again. Creation groans. Believers groan. And now even God's own Spirit within us groans. You might say that the Holy Spirit speaks our deepest language. You sense in this the **deep sympathy of the Holy Spirit for us**—his urgency in caring for our souls. **The Holy Spirit prays for us because he is in tune with our deepest needs.** Meanwhile, in heaven at God's right hand, the Lord Jesus is also interceding to God the Father for us. It is extraordinary to think that God the Spirit and God the Son are so deeply, emotionally involved in supporting us before the heavenly Father who loves us.

Illus.: Years ago I received a note from a young mom in our church. She began, "*It was the end. I knew it. I could no longer fight. I sat here emotionless. I was totally alone. Others had tried to help—doctors, nurses, parents, husband, children. But they were gone. Hours earlier I had come into the hospital on an emergency basis. I had back pain so severe that it, at times, dropped me to my knees. This was not my first hospital stay. I had been sick for a long time it seemed.*" Indeed—she had endured months of

sickness, hospitals, surgery. But she just didn't get well. She continued, "So, here I was, back in the hospital.

I sat in the bathroom. It was the middle of the night. No people, no 'miracle' medicine, no strength left. I was too tired to fight. I sat there—four walls surrounding me. And a bleak monotonous 'bleep' from my battery-operated IV filled the silence. I couldn't stop the sound of that miserable machine, anymore than I could control my own miserable life. So I sat there—dull, miserable, in pain, with no hope.

It was while I was there that I did hear something else. I didn't hear it with my ears—but I did in my spirit. I heard someone crying. And I immediately knew that it was Jesus crying for me. I was shocked—totally surprised. I didn't think he would do that for me.

This experience did not leave me emotionally elated. Nor did I feel a physical touch. Life was the same except I now knew I really was not in this battle alone. Jesus cared in a way my wildest imagination would never have hoped for or expected.

Slowly I got up and shuffled back to bed, my IV still 'bleeping' in my ears. Life was the same but different entirely. I believe that Jesus at that time made intercession to the Father for me. When there was absolutely no one else that would help me, He cried for me. And I did recover. Thank you, Jesus. [#1341]

- D. Notice the phrase in **v.27**, "And he [God the Father] who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit." God searches our hearts to know what is there. God is listening to your heart even when your prayers are muddled or misguided, or nothing more than moans. He tunes into your heart more than your words. What is your heart's desire in this time? Are you hungering for God? Do you want to honor Christ, no matter what else happens? Are you clinging to your hope of glory? God searches for those desires within us. And even when our hearts hide desires unbecoming a believer, we are still heard in love.

The good news here is that our hearts are occupied by the Holy Spirit and God knows what his own Spirit is thinking about you and me. He is reading his own mind! Do you know what's on the Spirit's mind? **How you can be shaped into Christlikeness**, because there is nothing better that the Almighty God can do for you than make you like Jesus. God's highest goal for you and me is that we become like Jesus. He says so later in **v.29**, "*For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.*" **That's the Christian's destiny—to take on a striking resemblance to Jesus.**

- E. So when suffering and hardships bring us to our knees—as they most certainly should—we are joined there in prayer by the Holy Spirit. **We join him in a duet of prayer too deep for words. Two prayers—ours and the Spirit's—in perfect pitch with the will of God.** And that is a prayer God is certain to hear and grant.
- F. And what do you know about the will of God for you, since that is what the Spirit is praying for? **V.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.*" **The will of God, for which the Spirit prays, is always—always—to work for your good.** From the very beginning of your new life, you have been part of God's great purpose. And thanks to our duet of prayer with the Holy Spirit God always works for our good. Our good is that we become like Christ—"*conformed to the image of his Son*"—so that we can be Jesus' own brothers and sisters. **Could there be anything better in this life or the next than to be like Jesus!**

Conclusion

Zora Neal Hurston said, "*I have been in Sorrow's kitchen and licked out all the pots. Then I have stood on the peaky mountain wrapped in rainbows, with a harp and a sword in my hands.*" Paul said, "*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*" He assured us of "*the freedom and glory of the children of God,*" and that

“those he justified he also glorified.” You will be like Jesus among a vast family of brothers and sisters who are all like Jesus in a new creation that groans no more.

So how do we respond to such good news? **Vv.31-39...**