

Isaiah 25:9 (Opening)

9 *It will be said on that day,
 "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he
 might save us.
 This is the LORD; we have waited for him;
 let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."*

Introduction

Anticipation; that excited wait for what we expect will be something wonderful.

I remember that feeling every Christmas Eve back when I was a kid. I remember being so excited that I didn't think I would be able to sleep. So excited and so tired that I would think I was hearing things, like something up on the roof (and would see no hoof-prints in the snow on the roof the next morning).

I had a similar feeling every July 4th as a little kid. We always went up to a lake near Millinocket to go swimming for the day, and ended the day at the fireworks that night. The excitement would build over the days leading up to the 4th.

There was also the same anticipation, but at a lower level, every Sunday afternoon when we'd drive to my mother's parent's house, about 30 miles away. It always seemed like it took forever to get there, but we'd stay there all afternoon. Today we'd call it "hanging out" but it was always a fun time to be there. And the ride home would always go by faster because there was less excitement about going home.

I remember the excitement I felt coming home from Army Basic Training. There was a combination of feelings there; first getting away from the unpleasant experience of basic training, but mostly getting home to a familiar and much more pleasant environment (where I wouldn't have to do push-ups every time I made a mistake).

Anticipation is a powerful emotion. Sometimes, though, the actual event we're anticipating doesn't live up to the build-up that we have with the anticipation in the days before. That's just how life is sometimes. We have to deal with those "let-down" situations that don't live up to the hype.

But one thing that we should be anticipating will more than live up to the hype and excitement, and that's what Paul writes about in our scripture for this week, Romans 8:18-25.

Romans 8:18-25

¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

They don't compare

Let's back up a little bit so we can understand what Paul is saying here. Paul ended the previous paragraph with this sentence: "The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him." That's the suffering that Paul is talking about here in verse 18.

As Christians, we're going to suffer. We're going to suffer for three reasons. The first reason we suffer is because we cause our own suffering. We do things that cause ourselves pain; we sin and have to deal with the consequences of that sin. It's going to happen. Sometimes those consequences slowly fade away, the suffering gets less and less as we grow stronger in Christ. That's a good thing, and that's part of our growth as Christians.

Another reason we suffer is because of the very fact that we are Christians. People are persecuted all over the world because they are followers of Christ. We can see it in the news a lot lately. And not just the type of persecution that we're being faced with here; no, that's nothing compared to what's going on in other countries around the world.

Paul reminds us here in Romans and also in his second letter to the Christians in Corinth that what we're facing and what we're going to face in the way of persecution is nothing when we compare it to how great it's going to be when we receive our final reward.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

We should be waiting with great anticipation for that day. Paul says our suffering is short term compared to our eternal life with God, and how good that will be.

Peter, in his first letter, said that we shouldn't be surprised about our struggles and persecution that happens. It should be reassuring to us that we are suffering, because Christ suffered and we are (hopefully) suffering in the name of Christ.

1 Peter 4:12-19

¹² Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are

insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. ¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. ¹⁶ Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. ¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And

*“If the righteous is scarcely saved,
what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”*

¹⁹ Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

I know, it doesn’t feel right to suffer for doing what’s good and what’s right, but that’s how the world is going to treat us as Christians. The world treats us that way because they don’t know God. That’s what John tells us in his first letter.

1 John 3:1-3

¹ See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know Him. ² Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is. ³ And everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He is pure.

We broke it

If you were paying attention earlier you heard me say that there are three reasons we suffer. But so far I’ve only talked about two. The third reason we suffer is because of a curse that was put on the earth thousands of years ago because of one man’s sin.

When God created everything, He said that everything was good. But because humans gave in to temptation from the evil one, the entire race was punished. Let's look back at Genesis 3, verses 17-19.

Genesis 3:17-19

*17 And to Adam he said,
"Because you have listened to the voice of your wife
and have eaten of the tree
of which I commanded you,
'You shall not eat of it,'
cursed is the ground because of you;
in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
18 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.
19 By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread,
till you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
for you are dust,
and to dust you shall return."*

Before that life was easy. Everything grew as God blessed it, and there was no labor involved in life. However, because of what we call "the Fall", we've been cursed with having to work to survive. And that work isn't easy. That work causes suffering.

In fact, Paul tells us back in Romans 8, starting in verse 20, that all creation became subject to futility because of Adam. The Greek word translated as futility here in verse 20 is the same word used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament book of Lamentations for the word used so often in that book, vanity.

But even creation has hope that it will also be freed from this curse that mankind has caused so many years ago. All of creation groans under

the suffering that it is under, waiting for the day that it will be redeemed from the suffering it's under. So much so that Paul uses a term that we translate as "eager longing" back in verse 19. The Greek word gives more the image for me of a prairie dog, on its hind legs, straining to see what's coming.

And it's not just creation around us that's groaning. Paul says that we too are groaning under the suffering that we have to deal with.

2 Corinthians 5:1-5

¹ For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ² For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, ³ if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. ⁴ For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵ He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

Paul compares our body to a tent. Anyone who's spent time in a tent knows that it's not very sturdy, and can fall apart or fall down at any time, especially if there's a strong wind or bad storm. A tent isn't the best shelter. But Paul says that that we have, not a tent, but a building from God. A building is much more permanent than a tent, and will stand up to whatever comes at it. Even though we groan in our sufferings here, we'll have a strong house to be in when we get home.

He's going to fix it

In a way, all the reasons we're suffering and facing persecution is because of what we've done, either individually or collectively. We chose to sin, so we face the consequences of that; we chose to become Christians, and we're persecuted for that; and we as a race chose to disobey God from the beginning, so we suffer through every day of our life just to live.

But there's good news. Eventually, if we suffer for Christ, we'll be rewarded with that building in exchange for this weak tent. God will redeem us completely. Right now we as Christians are redeemed, but we still suffer. When that redemption is complete we will be like Christ, the firstborn from the dead. We will have a body that doesn't fall apart like this one does.

None of us have seen a resurrected body. We can read about Jesus being raised from the dead, but we haven't actually seen it happen. We may know people that have been brought back through medical means, but we know they're going to die again, and this time permanently. We all will. But we have a hope, a deep felt belief based in faith in Christ and everything He's told us, that we will be raised in a new body, and will live forever with him.

Back in Peter's first letter, chapter 1, verses 3-9, Peter talks about that hope.

1 Peter 1:3-9

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹ obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

That's the good news, right there. We have faith and hope that when the last day comes, when God finally makes things right, when He removes the curse and restores all things to the way they were before, in the garden, that we'll be filled with joy because we've believed in Him and trusted Him and His love for us, and not relied on our weak, broken flesh. Even though we suffer through this life, we'll be rewarded for that on the last day.

Conclusion

So, let me ask you a question. What are you waiting for? Are you waiting for tomorrow with anticipation? Are you "working for the weekend" as the song goes? Are you anticipating Christmas or your birthday, or some other holiday? Or are you waiting with great anticipation for that day when everything will be made right, when God will fix everything that has been broken, and we'll be raised in Him with new, incorruptible bodies? Right now we say "Well, nobody's perfect!" but on that day, we'll all be made perfect in Christ.

To me, that's something to look forward to. But that will only happen for those who are in Christ. There's a reward for those who aren't in Christ, but that reward is eternal death. Wouldn't it be better to receive eternal life on that day? That's what it means to "be saved". You're not saved from anything you face today, tomorrow, or even next year. You're saved from eternal death.

If you're saved, great! If you don't know if you are or not, let's talk about it.

Revelation 21:1-4 (Closing)

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

Hebrews 11:1-2 (Study)

¹ Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ² For by it the people of old received their commendation.

1 Thessalonians 5:6-11

⁶ So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. ⁷ For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. ⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹ For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.

¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

Jeremiah 12:4

⁴ How long will the land mourn
and the grass of every field wither?
For the evil of those who dwell in it
the beasts and the birds are swept away,
because they said, "He will not see our latter end."