

## **What Do You Live For?**

January 31, 2010 - Romans 8:18-30

In 12 days it begins. 825 athletes from over 80 countries descend on Vancouver for the Winter Olympic Games. Approximately 25,000 volunteers will assist with hundreds of tasks. Thousands of soldiers and police stand ready for security. 86 gold, silver and bronze medals await the victors. Yes, the Olympics bring people from all over the world together. Yes, Vancouver and British Columbia will be showcased to the world. Yes, the spirit of participation and sportsmanship will be acknowledged. But the ultimate goal for those 800 plus athletes is that medal podium.

They trained for years to get there. They've made many personal sacrifices. They beat out the best from their countries to qualify. It will all depend on a good run down the hill, or landing that skating jump or getting to the finish line 2 one hundredths of a second before the closest competitor. Glory awaits the gold medal winners. It will probably be satisfying and exhilarating for many of the silver and bronze medal winners.

But some will go home with no medals. All their training, sacrifice and effort will not get them on that podium. Some will rest with the knowledge that they did their best. Some will be disappointed but realize missed gates or bouncing pucks happen. Some might be crushed at the dashing of their Olympic dream.

Now I don't think anyone from our church community is going to the Olympics with the hope that they will end up on that medal podium as a winner. But we all have medal podiums in our lives. We might call them our goals, purpose, accomplishments and legacy—which begs the question: What are your goals in life? What medal podium do you set your eyes on? What do you live for? A paycheck; a vacation; a new toy; the good life however you define that; success; meeting the right person, children and their well-being; the family; a legacy. Is God part of any of the medal podiums you aim for?

There are smaller podiums in life like getting a ribbon for a swimming level or receiving a certificate at a training seminar. There are medium podiums like passing a grade, graduating from high school, completing a degree or earning your working certification. There are large podiums like securing a permanent position, entering into marriage, parenting or influencing a child's life, leaving a legacy, retiring after decades of service and seeing your grandkids.

Then there is the ultimate podium; the one that towers over our entire lives both now and forever. That podium stands behind Jesus on Judgment Day. God's verdict about us that Day determines whether or not we will reach that ultimate podium. What is this podium and how can we know that we will make it?

That's what we will hear about today. If you're a Christian, I have great news for you again. **God supports His children through tough training and will get us all onto the ultimate medal podium.**

Last week in our Roman's study, we discovered that we Christians are the adopted children of God. We saw God's resources for His children like the Holy Spirit to lead us to holiness; His help so we can pray Abba, Father; and His testimony in our spirits that we are indeed God's children. Paul the author of Romans connected our adopted child status to our heir status. Our passage ended with these words "provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him." That leads us into this week's passage.

Here we will discover the ultimate medal podium, the reality of the tough training needed to get there and the help God provides for His children along the way. By the end of our time together, I hope some Christians here, especially those of you suffering in some way, will receive great encouragement and hope to keep going and growing. I pray some Christians might see they're aiming for the wrong podium and need a course correction. I pray that those here who have not received Christ will see your need for Him so you too can look forward with confidence to your arrival on that ultimate podium.

### Romans 8:18-30 (ESV)

#### Future Glory

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.

26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. 27 And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. 28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

### **What is the “ultimate medal podium?” (8:18)**

**The “ultimate medal podium” is our great inheritance from God.** The podium on the other side of Judgment Day is “our glorification.” As children and heirs of our Father, we look forward to standing on the podium of our inheritance. Verse 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.” This glory is our inheritance.

As John Piper points out, there are at least three parts to this inheritance. ***First we inherit God Himself.*** Romans 5:2 states “We rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” Piper says “*In other words, the great joy of our hope is that one day we will see and savor the glory of God himself.*” Revelation 21:3 describes the glory of our future intimate face to face relationship with God. “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.” When we pass through the Last Day and Christ declares us “not guilty,” we enter this new realm of relationship with God. We will be with the glorious One, our Creator and Lord of the Universe. We will see Jesus face to face! We inherit God.

***Second, we inherit the renewed earth.*** Romans 4:13 – “For the promise to Abraham and his offspring (that’s you and me; Christians) that he would be heir of *the world* did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.” In other words, if we share Abraham’s faith, we inherit the renewed earth with him.

Piper says “If you are an heir of God, then you will inherit what is God's. And God owns the world. Psalm 24:1 “The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it.” So if the earth is the Lord's and everything in it, then the heirs of the Lord will inherit the earth and everything in it. In Psalm 2:8 God says to his Son, “Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession.” And if we are fellow heirs with the Son, then we shall inherit the nations.

So we inherit God Himself. We inherit the renewed earth to live on. That means we need something to live in. *The third part of our inheritance is redeemed and glorified bodies.* If we are going to enjoy the renewed earth, we need new bodies. Piper writes “if we are to enjoy the world and all that is in it, and if all these good things are not to compete with God and become idols, then we must have bodies capable of deeper, higher, fuller joys than we presently have. And we must be rid of all the pain and crying and tears of this world. So Romans 8:22-23 says, "For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. 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."

Last week we saw God adopt us at the moment of conversion as our children. But when we receive our resurrection bodies, we're adopted in the fullest sense. That occurs when Christ returns. The dead in Christ will rise first to receive their resurrection bodies. We will be changed in the twinkling of an eye and given our new bodies. We will come before the judgment seat and hear the verdict – not guilty.” Then we will proceed to the ultimate medal podium to enjoy our inheritance on the renewed earth now joined with heaven. God will dwell with us and we will roam the earth in our resurrection bodies to live life free from sin's presence. That's what we look forward to.

Until that time, we've got lives to live here. They involve some tough training.

### **What is the tough training? (8:18)**

*The sufferings of this present time.* Verse 18 – *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to the glory that is to be revealed in us.”*

What are these sufferings? Well, certainly they involve the sufferings that come with being a Christian. Any growing Christian will experience some sort of suffering or persecution. 2 Timothy 3:12 states “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” The persecution may come in the form of arrest and imprisonment. It can come in the form of oppression and discouragement from the devil and his forces. Or it can come through distraction from Christ and what's really important. But these sufferings also include ordinary life struggles: illness; hunger; financial troubles; death of a loved one; our own death; bad news; accidents.

All these make up the tough training of our life's journey. When we ponder our sufferings, it kind of makes verse 18 seem ridiculous. "I consider that our present sufferings *are not worth comparing* with the glory to be revealed?" What is Paul doing here? "Not worth comparing?" People who suffer know it hurts; it's weighty and painful. The scars run deep and long. We feel the pain and the hurt even right now. Why is there suffering? What does it ultimately accomplish?

### **Why suffering?**

*God uses them to build into us perseverance of faith in Him.* Through suffering, we can become more dependent on God than on ourselves. We saw this in Romans 5. We heard Kevin Swan, our newest elder quote those verses as part of his testimony. Romans 5:3 – "More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope and hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

Suffering produces endurance and perseverance of faith in God and His ability to bring us to the ultimate medal podium, if we turn to Him in faith.. How does suffering do this? Piper writes, "It knocks the props of self-reliance (and trust in things and people) out from under us and makes us rely more on God.

*If there were no afflictions and difficulties and troubles and pain, our fallen hearts would fall ever more deeply in love with the comforts and securities and pleasures of this world instead of falling more deeply in love with our inheritance beyond this world, namely, God himself. Suffering is appointed for us in this life as a great mercy to keep us from loving this world more than we should and to make us rely on God who raises the dead.*

*"Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).*

I remember when my father was dying. I flew out from Ottawa to Calgary and went directly to the Foothills Hospital. I saw my Dad and agreed that I would stay the night. Before I arrived I hoped and prayed that God would heal. But that night, my dad needed 7 breakthroughs or upping of medicine to manage his intense pain. The next morning at breakfast with my sister, I said "I would rather have God take him than have him live like that." I would never have made that statement if Dad was healthy and vital. The fires of suffering can open our hearts and clenched fists that hold on so tightly to the way things are. (Not that I controlled that,

but God used those days to work in my heart His greater purpose.) Dad passed away five days later. We sorrowed in our loss and rejoiced in what Dad gained. I haven't lost my Dad! I've just lost communication with him for awhile. But that suffering was necessary for me to let him go into God's glorious kingdom.

The ultimate medal podium is our future inheritance of God, the renewed world and our resurrection bodies. In this life, we undergo the tough training of suffering. It serves ultimately to make us cherish and depend on the Lord more than the things or people of this world. But God does not leave His children alone to bear this tough training.

Much of this passage describes resources from the Father to help His children through the tough suffering of this life.

### **What help does God provide for His children through the tough training? (8:26-30)**

God provides *The Holy Spirit's intercession in prayer when we don't know what to pray for*. Verses 26 and 27 describe this. There will be times we don't know what to do or even pray for. So when that happens in prayer, the Holy Spirit steps in to pray for us. He prays in accordance with the will of God. His prayer will be exactly what needs to be prayed for. So Christian, don't fret when you don't know what to pray. Many times this will happen. But that's okay. God doesn't leave His children without resources. There's a link on your insert to an entire message dedicated to these verses in 2008. Please go there to discover more about this great help of God.

<http://www.svbc.ab.ca/sermons/2008/nov/02/when-we-dont-know-what-to-pray/>

Another help of God for His children is found in verse 28. "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." Here we discover *God's ability to work for the good of those who love Him in all things*. Even our sufferings, God can bring good out of them.

How we define the word "good" is critical to understanding this verse. "Good" does not necessarily mean "better." "Well, if I'm having trouble with my job, God will work all things for good by getting me a better job." The good here refers to our good for His purposes. So good might be "closer to Him." It might mean

“more Christ like” or “growing a stronger faith in Him.” The good might mean “a greater ability to praise God in all things.”

Psalm 116 is the testimony of someone who went through a hard time and saw God’s good come out of it. He was nearly dead or overwhelmed. “The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came upon me; I was overcome by trouble and sorrow.” Then I called on the name of the Lord: “O Lord, save me!”

Later he proclaims, For you, O Lord, have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before the Lord in the land of the living. This Psalmist would never have had this trust in and perspective on the Lord had he not gone through this troubled time.

He might not have gained a deeper intimacy with the Lord had He not gone through this trouble. Somehow suffering has a way of drawing us close to the Lord with tastes of sweetness amidst the bitterness. So on the other side of some difficult experience and even as it happens, we can praise God for His provision through it or see the world in new light or appreciate more fully the blessing of an ordinary day. In your suffering and burdens right now, God is at work on His pattern for good. If you can’t see it right now, look back on your life and ask Him to reveal how He’s already done that. Then trust Him to unfold His pattern when it is time.

God promises to deliver His kids to the ultimate medal podium and provides for them through the tough training to get there. But will it really come true? Will God really be able to deliver us to the ultimate medal podium? In the last two verses of this passage, Paul declares that *God works throughout eternity to bring us to the medal podium*. God has been at work since before time began to ensure His children receive their inheritance. Now we could dedicate a message to each major word in verses 29 and 30. There is some very deep and incredible truth here. And in a future message series if the Holy Spirit leads us to this, we will look at each major word. But today we must not lose the overall view of the forest to focus on some individual trees.

So what is the big picture? Verse 29 – “For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.” Before time began God worked for His children. Based on something God knew beforehand and His decision to predestine, He marked those who would be His children. The end of verse 29 talks about His purpose for them – to be

conformed to the likeness of His Son – Jesus. Then Jesus will be one of many children although He is the pre-eminent child. So 29 talks about God’s work to get us to ultimate medal podium before time began.

Verse 30 talks about His work during history and in our lives. “And those whom he predestined, he also called, and those whom he called he also justified and those whom he justified he also glorified.” So before time God predestined His children. Then during our lives God called us to Himself. Those called respond and receive Christ. Then He justifies us. Remember we learned that word way back in Romans 3:23-24 – “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (but all who believe) are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” Justification is that right legal standing before God. God could declare us not guilty forever because He poured out His wrath on Jesus on the cross.

Justification ensures that we will receive a not guilty verdict on judgment day and proceed through the medal podium. “Those he justified he also glorified.” Notice he puts glorification in the past tense. No more work on God’s part needs to be done to guarantee glorification. In just two verses Paul provides a sweeping assurance that our Father will see us through to the medal podium. He began this work before time began and will complete it when the Day arrives.

God supports His children through the tough training of life and will get us all onto the ultimate medal podium. What’s our part in all this?

### Christian

***Pray for a clearer vision of the glory to be revealed to you.*** It will indeed be glorious. In fact, it is so glorious that all creation “eagerly awaits” its arrival. But we need to continue to gain hold of all God reveals about our glorious inheritance in His Word. Search for it; discover it. Then pursue it.

***Take the bitterness of your sufferings and weigh them against the glory to be revealed.*** Verse 18 said “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us.” I don’t want you to leave here today thinking I’m minimizing any suffering you’re going through. We have a tendency to do that at times. I talked with someone this week that went through a disturbing couple of days. Then they heard about another person’s suffering they said something like “well when you hear that, what am I complaining about?” It’s true that another’s suffering can put ours in perspective. But our sufferings are real

and do hurt. I don't think Paul minimized the reality or hurt of his sufferings. But he shared a perspective we need to adopt about our suffering.

So consider your suffering and burdens. Maybe think of all the suffering of your life. Then think of those weigh scales that have two pans on either side held in place by a chain. In the middle is the pivot point. The pan with the heavier weight will hang lower than the other pan. Now imagine taking all your life suffering and placing it in one pan. That pan would hit the ground. It may seem like nothing could ever compensate or come close to evening out that suffering.

But Paul says that our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory to be revealed. When that glory is revealed the other pan will hit the ground overwhelmed by the weight of glory. The chains that held that pan will break. Our sufferings will not offer a blip of counter weight. That's what's coming. So put your sufferings on that weigh scale and recognize they won't compare to the coming glory. Until that day the Lord offers all these resources to help us keep going along the way. So ask the Holy Spirit to intercede when you don't know what to pray. Trust in God's ability to work things together for good. Rest in God's work throughout eternity to bring you to the medal stand. Let all that build into your hope. Without hope we fade away and shrivel up. But in this hope we were saved.

If you have not received Christ you won't get to the "medal podium" if you die today. God calls out to you through this service and His Word and His message to say come to me and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart. And you will find rest for your souls. Will you receive Christ now?

In 12 days, the Olympics begin in Vancouver. In 28 days it will all be over. Some will have made it the podium. Some will not get close. But for Christians our journey to the ultimate medal podium began before the creation of this Earth. It continues through this life and there's no doubt all of God's children will make it.

So don't give up and don't sit down in the dark and don't conclude that it's all meaningless. God will get you to the medal podium. He will walk with you every step through the tough training of this life. Keep going in His strength until its medal time! .