



What have you come to believe? God reveals His glorious plan for our salvation through His Son Jesus Christ. God loves you. Jesus died for you. Life is restored for you. Come to believe in Jesus Christ.

I'VE COME TO BELIEVE • Romans 8:18–30 • Michael Thornton • June 28, 2020

My life has been marked by so many moments of doubt. Of wondering if this is it. Of feeling let down by any promise of purpose. I spent no small amount of time walking the sidewalks of my undergrad campus wondering why I felt pulled into studying written and spoken communication when it seemed, let me say, not the most financially prudent decision. It's so often so difficult to see what God is up to in our present circumstances.

Our passage today speaks of glory, eternal glory, but so often I feel like I'm doing pretty good to just make it through the day. Now, don't get me wrong, our passage speaks of glory, yes, but not without also speaking to the global, inter-generational frustration, across time, where we can both sense the glory we're made for, but we look around at our day-to-day reality and it just doesn't line up. There's an undercurrent of frustration to the human condition. Our passage uses words like groan and images like prolonged labor in childbirth to describe these tones of pain that are present for each one of us. These tones of pain, have you felt them in this COVID-19 season? These feelings of frustration and groaning and prolonged-ness—I find myself turning to my wife just about every week and saying in a voice of groaning and frustration, "This virus just won't go away!"

This COVID season just knocks us off balance, doesn't it? All of us together, we're all in this together, yet each in our own unique circumstances. For me it has been becoming the Pastor of Discipleship only to have the new church I'm serving, in a new city, empty out overnight because of a global virus outbreak. Friends, up until March of this year you just couldn't have made this stuff up! I mean, the first time I put on a robe as an ordained minister and none of you showed up! And now, three months later, you're still not back! Do you know what that does to someone's self-confidence!? I'm both joking and lamenting at the same time. My wife, Cassie, and I also welcomed our second child into the world on March 22. The hospital almost didn't let me in to be with Cassie for her labor and delivery. Crazy times!

If I'm to begin to be honest with you, I have to admit it's mostly in these times that I question God's plans for me. I question if God has a purpose for me. "Really God? These circumstances? Are you there? As you can see, this is pretty uncomfortable. A little help, please?" Do you feel that? What have your unique circumstances been during this COVID season? We're all in this together, yet each in our own unique circumstances. Today we're reconsidering our circumstances. What is God up to in all this? Do our circumstances have a greater purpose to our story?

We're walking through **Your Greatest Story**. The story of God rescuing you, redeeming you, claiming you as his own. It's the story of Jesus and how He saves your soul. Through this series, we've laid out Your Greatest Story as: (1) God loves you. (2) Your sin separates you from God. Last week we looked at number (3) Jesus died for your sins. Today we're learning how (4) God has a plan for your life. We'll be here together for two weeks. Don't miss this. (1) God loves you. (2) Your sin separates you from God. (3) Jesus died for your sins, and (4) God has a plan for your life. This is Your Greatest Story.

Each of our primary texts through our current series have come up out of the letter to the church in Rome, written by the apostle Paul right around AD 56. Our text this week picks up in Romans chapter 8, exactly where we left off last week. I invite you now to open the Word of God to Romans chapter 8 and let's read together these holy words, verses 18-30: "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. 19 For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be

revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? 25 But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. 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. 29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. 30 And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified."

As the word begins to settle into our hearts, let's go the Lord together in prayer. "Spirit of the Living God, fall fresh on us now. Enliven our hearts to see the plans you have for us. Open the eyes of our hearts to better understand the glorious eternity you have prepared for your people. May the glory you are preparing for all of our tomorrows change the way we live all of our todays. Place your passion deep in our bones that we might desire for every decision we make to be a Kingdom decision. Guide and guard this time. In Jesus' name, amen.

Our text begins by addressing present sufferings and future glory. "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (verse 18). Let's be clear: Paul is not being flippant here. He's not waving his hand and saying, "O, stop worrying about how hard life is, forget all that and just drift off with me into daydreaming about eternity . . . stop processing this global pandemic and racial wounds and how we're going to get the children and youth of our city back to school this fall. Don't worry about the physical world, just think about the 'next life.'" No! No! What Paul is doing so masterfully here, inspired by the very Spirit of God, is momentarily drawing our attention away from looking down at the "bondage to decay" all around us, all of our circumstantial realities (verse 21) and lifting our heads, our eyes and our hearts up to the finished work of Christ on the cross. The cross, friends. This is where Your Greatest Story left off last week. The cross. Jesus died for your sins. When you stand at the foot of the cross, you must lift up your gaze to see Jesus and see what He's doing for you.

You see, you weren't just saved from something, but you were saved for something. And what you are saved for, frankly, is beautiful beyond telling. You're saved from sin, but you're saved for glory. And we just can't fully comprehend the weight of this yet. In his letter to the church in Corinth, Paul puts it this way, "For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known," (1 Corinthians 13:12). What Paul is doing is lifting up our heads to ponder and begin to grasp the "glory that will be revealed in us" in order that we understand that God has plans for you in the here and now. So we lift up our heads, allow the Spirit of the Living God to imprint on the eyes of our hearts a vision for where God is leading us, and then level our gaze once again to walk each and every day as witnesses to the jaw-dropping, heart-pounding, mind-boggling gospel of Jesus Christ

to everyone we meet. Let's join Paul in this exercise. Let's lift up our gaze, begin to catch the glorious eternity that is a breath away, and then let's level our gaze once again to see the incredible plans God has for us in the here and now.

Glory. It's a word too grand for our not yet-fully-redeemed hearts to grasp, but it's where Paul immediately goes. "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (verse 18). Our text this week then moves into describing what it's like to know we're made for glory, but to live between the inauguration of the Kingdom of God at the Death and Resurrection of Jesus and the culmination of the New Heavens and the New Earth when Jesus establishes His forever and full reign upon this earth. Jesus inaugurated His kingdom through His death and resurrection. Heaven is invading earth every day. People are being saved every day. But there is a difference between the inauguration and the culmination. That's the space you and I live in between, the here and not yet.

Our text says that "Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies" (verse 23). We have the very Spirit of the Living God as our proof and assurance of our full adoption and redemption, yet we groan inwardly because we feel more acutely than any other person on the planet the frustration of the brokenness that sin has wrecked upon our land. Our circumstances are drenched with sin and it makes a mess of everything.

But God. Your Greatest Story is about God breaking into your sin-soaked story, into your every circumstance, and giving you a purpose right where you are that will culminate in your eternal glorification. Verses 28–30 conclude our passage: "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. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified."

"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." First, "all things." Let's be clear, God does not promise you that your circumstances are going to look any better than your non-Christian neighbor, but what God does promise the believer is that God will work your circumstances for good. For good. And what is the good? Who defines what is good? If we're talking about my good, my flesh-dominant good, then it's ski season at Beaver Creek with some slick new Icelantics and a new Audi A8 with fresh winter tires and a thermos full of hot chocolate and endless childcare opportunities. It's my own idea of temporal and personal comfort and happiness where I have no responsibility to anything except attending to my own desires. When the flesh defines good, good becomes nothing more than self-worship. How does your flesh define good? But all praise to God, the good God is talking about is His good, not my flesh's version of good, but real, eternal good.

O, May your heart leap for joy at these words in verse 29: "to be conformed to the image of his Son." And who does this apply to? "those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose"—his purpose! God does have a purpose for you, friends, and it's so incredible—to catch the fullness of God's plans for you, God's purpose for you, is like looking at the sun trying to visually comprehend the full beauty of its surface. It's too bright for our eyes right now, but the day is quickly coming that every child of God will be glorified, fully conformed into the likeness of Jesus ... forevermore.

What will it be like for sin to be completely removed from your heart? What will it feel like to never again covet? We're lifting up our eyes for a moment. We're seeing where God is leading us, and then we're going to level our gaze and celebrate how this reality compels us to live on mission for God each and every day. God has such good, good plans for your life. God has a purpose for your life that is eternally good. Imagine with me what it means to be made eternally glorious. You see, I think there's a secular culture of false humility that you and I are steeped in every day just by virtue of living in the cultural context in which God has placed us. A false humility hears the phrase "eternally glorious" and chases the mere thought of it away before it can have time to imprint itself upon our imagination. But your glorification, which glorifies the Father, is what God is doing. God doesn't just save you from sin; He's up to something absolutely incredible in your heart. He's making you into the very likeness of Christ.

Here's why I'm lasering in on this: To the degree that you are unable to grasp God's purpose for you, to that degree you will be unable to intentionally live for God each and every day. Why? Because until you begin to grasp the eternal glory that God has purposed for His children, you will hold too tightly to the things of this world. Temporal circumstances will mean too much to you. Friends, hear me on this, hear your Pastor of Discipleship on this: across the globe there are far too many well-meaning people participating in church that remain so wrapped up in their own temporal self-preservation that the real heart transformation that the Father desires is simply and tragically not happening. O that you would internalize and live out of the eternal glory God has purposed for you. There is a heaviness to this reality that C.S. Lewis so famously pinned whereby only Kingdom humility can carry the significance of what God wants to do in your heart—the weight of glory that God is pulling you, YOU, up out of "the bondage of decay," (verse 21) and transferring you into the glory of the Beloved.

We must imagine, we must "image" what God is speaking to us. We must strive for our hearts to understand what's really going on. To imagine is to see not just with your eye or your mind, but with your heart. So please open your heart with me this hour and let this image take root: "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us (verse 18) ... we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his PURPOSE... (verse 28) to be conformed to the image of his Son... (verse 29) ... those he justified he glorified (verse 30)."

How is God working His glory into your heart? By taking every single circumstance of your life—the good clear through to the awful—and redeeming them to more and more conform your heart to Jesus. O that you would desire this above anything else. In Genesis 50:20 we find this treasure: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." God takes the circumstances of his children and brings about salvation. We worship the Genesis 50:20 God!

Friends, when God calls you, He claims you as His own, He sets his seal on you, He purposes to conform you into the very image of His Son. Relative to eternity, within the next tick on the clock, the people of God will be fully glorified forevermore. Open your heart to this reality, just a little while longer and "all the things" of your life will have been fully worked together to bring you safely into eternity where you will walk with clean hands and with a pure heart, joy forevermore. All things, all your circumstances: the circumstances that feel good to you, as well as the hardest, saddest, most seemingly crippling—God is a redeeming God.

Catch the vision that God is speaking to us through Romans chapter 8. When you love God, God begins a process of transforming you into the likeness of Jesus and the culmination of this transformation is your glorification forevermore in the very near presence of God. Tragically, many in the family of God have misapplied this jaw-dropping reality of the future. There is a temptation to become fixated on some abstract, elusive "heaven out there," not recognizing that for the child of God "heaven" was inaugurated at the Death and Resurrection of Jesus. It is in the present tense that we are called to walk with the Lord, to be united with the risen Lamb and His people. And the only real place to walk presently with the Lord is within the context that He has placed you in.

So let's now level our eyes. We've been looking up at the eternal glory into which we are being ushered more rapidly than we can comprehend, but we have time left in the here and now. We level our eyes to the context in which God has placed us in order to partner with God in extending His salvation by walking as faithful witnesses to the risen Lamb. Our journal this week reads: Your Greatest Story is filled to overflowing with ultimate purpose and meaning. God saves you, claiming you as his own, bestowing upon you the identity of one of his own children. John exclaims, "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 John 3:1a). And we quickly learn that God has incredible plans for His children. We are called to be our Father's ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20). We are called to live lives worthy of so great a salvation (Philippians 1:27). We are called to walk as the salt of the earth and the light of the world, all to the end of displaying the splendor of our glorious God that even more might be saved (Matthew 5:13-16, Isaiah 61:3).

And on the left panel: What does it mean to live wholeheartedly for God and His mission? What are some ways in which you sense God calling you to display His kindness to those you interact with?

My life has been marked by so many moments of doubt. Of wondering if this is it. Of feeling let down by any promise of purpose. And I think that's something you and I share as people living under the fall. There's a sadness, a frustration, a groaning to living in the here and now. There's virus and riot and it all feels like it's rotting us away to nothing. But let this truth ring deep into your heart this day, the here and now is not the final word. The final word is that God has a purpose for your life. An eternal purpose that includes all of your todays! When you love Him, God is using every circumstance of your life to conform you to the image of His Son. It changes everything. And not just all of your tomorrows, but all of your todays. Stand up in each and every one of your todays and live for God. Be an extension of His hands and feet today. Fight for the inbreaking of the Kingdom of heaven in every way you can. Fight for the heart of God to transform all of creation. Reconciliation. Meaning. Purpose. Justice. Mercy. The breaking of every wall of hostility beginning always with the walls of hostility in your own heart. Live it. Live it today. I've come to believe. God has plans for me.

Let's Pray: Spirit of the Living God, conform me to the image of Jesus. Fall afresh on me / Melt me, mold me, Fill me, use me. Help me to see how you are taking every circumstance of my life to conform me to the image of Jesus, displaying your splendor, extending your salvation. As I walk out all of my todays, may I do so with your eternal purpose at the forefront of my thinking. Help me in Jesus' name, amen.

STUDY GUIDE

I'VE COME TO BELIEVE • "God Has Plans for Me"

Romans 8:18-30

UP: UP: Connect with God through Spending Time in His Word

Slowly, we are learning how to walk in a new atmosphere. Grace is the word. Grace. John opens his gospel saying, "For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace." Of all the peoples of the world, the children of God must walk in the grace of God if we are to reflect this core attribute of God. This summer the word is grace. In exactly the pace at which the Lord is leading you through Covid-19, may his grace abound to you.

Begin your study in prayer. Read and reflect on Romans 8:18-30.

- 1) Why does Paul compare our present suffering to our future glory?
- 2) Why is all of creation "frustrated" and "groaning"?
- 3) Host a conversation about God working all of your life circumstances for "good." What is the "good" the author (Paul) has in mind here?

OUT: Connect With the World Around Us (Join God in His Mission)

4) This week we lift our heads up to see the eternal and glorious plans God has for His people and then we are challenged to take that eternal vision and allow it to shape our every decision in the here and now. In other words, we are challenged to allow all of our todays to be primarily influenced by all of our sure tomorrows. Give an example of how your decision-making might be different by first thinking of your identity in Christ and the world's great need of salvation.

IN: Connect with Each Other

In our current series you are invited to fill out the journal mailed to you. Host a conversation on sharing your salvation stories with one another. Encourage, exhort, and speak the truth in love to one another. Connect with your core circle and pray with and for one another.