

## **Adoption**

### **Sons Displayed In Glory**

By **Derek Thomas**

#### **Romans 8:18-25**

Turn with me now, if you would, to Romans chapter 8, Romans chapter 8. We've been ranging over a number of texts, dealing as we have been with the series theme of adoption. This glorious theme, that God in His marvelous grace has brought us into a living relationship with Himself, adopted us into His household and family that we should be called, as John says in 1 John 3 in verse 1, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called *the children of God*." And John is implying a word there in 1 John 3 that implies that this love comes from another world; it is from outside of this world. How great is the love of God to us. We've looked at Romans 8 a number of times and I want us this evening to go back tonight to a glorious passage in Romans 8, one that we haven't touched on thus far, and I think this will form a wonderful conclusion to our consideration of this grand and important doctrine in the New Testament. I'm going to pick it up at verse 18, Romans 8 at verse 18, and I'm going to read through to the end of verse 25. But before we do so, let's pray for God's blessing upon the reading of Scripture. Let's pray.

*Father, we are thankful for many things, but we are thankful especially just now for the Bible, for Your inerrant word that holy men of old wrote as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. We thank You for this chapter, the eighth chapter of Romans, and ask that by Your Spirit You would open it up to us and hide it within our hearts, for Jesus' sake. Amen.*

Verses 18 through 25 of Romans 8:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our

body. For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

Amen. May God bless to us the reading of His holy and inerrant word.

### **I. The road to glory is via the pathway of suffering.**

Now I want us to get into this passage as quickly as possible this evening. It's one of these gloriously high, soaring passages that take our breath away, because Paul is expressing something here which quite honestly is inexpressible. And he's calling upon us to view something that we have never seen the like of. And Paul is calling upon us in this eighth chapter of Romans, and particularly here, to see something of the immensity that lies before us in terms of a glory that He has prepared for all of the children of God.

Now he says three things and the relationship between them is like this: First of all, he makes a general statement, a thesis if you like; and then in the second place, he illustrates it; and then in the third place, he draws an inference from it. He makes a statement; he illustrates it; and then he draws an inference from it. That's the design of the passage. The statement that Paul makes—and what a glorious statement it is! What an amazing statement it is! That the road to glory is via the pathway of suffering: that's the statement. *The road to glory is via the pathway of suffering.* Those who are destined for glory will suffer in this world. He has already alluded to it in verse 17. He says that we are children; we are heirs; we are heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ. He's elaborated something of the doctrine of adoption. He's spoken of the spirit of adoption that indwells us provided, he goes on to say, we suffer with Him in order that we may be glorified with Him. And Paul is underlining for us here that in the exposition of this grand and glorious truth of adoption, that the Holy Spirit—as he calls Him here in the eighth chapter of Romans, the 'spirit of adoption'—that adoption is one of the principle works that the Holy Spirit engages in, and that He indwells our heart in such a way that He makes us conscious that we have a relationship with God as our Father and with Jesus as our Elder Brother. We are joint heirs with Christ and with the Spirit as the spirit of adoption, so that adoption brings us into a relationship with the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And the Spirit witnesses with our spirits that we are the children of God, enabling us to cry, "Abba, Father."

But there is this problem. And glorious as all of that is, and wonderful as all of that is, and encouraging as all of that is, Paul is realistic at this point because he says, provided that we suffer with Him, that our union with Christ guarantees that we will be called upon in some form or another to pass through a valley of suffering. It's one of those, I think, that Paul expresses with greater and greater force, I think, in the course of his ministry and in the course of his writing of the

New Testament: that the relationship between glorification and suffering is not nearly chronological. That is to say that glorification follows suffering.

But for the Apostle Paul, and it's a key thought—for the Apostle Paul *the relationship between glorification and suffering is causal, that you cannot get to glory except through the pathway of suffering.* What Bunyan calls, 'Hill Difficulty' and the 'Slough of Despond'...and that there are these issues and things in this life that hinder our progress and tempt us to veer away. 'And beyond them,' Paul is saying, 'lies, and through them lies the glory that awaits the children of God.' And it's to that glory that Paul wants us to look: that one of the marvelous consequences of being the children of God is that we are destined for glory. And it's as though Paul in Romans 8 is trying to peer at the magnificence of the glory that awaits the children of God, but he can't see it for a minute because there's smoke in the air. There's a smell of battle and the noise of battle, and the smoke, for a minute, isn't clearing. It's Helm's Deep and Pellenor Fields all over again.

And that's the experience of some of you tonight: that you know you're the children of God; you know you're adopted into the household and family of God; and do you know that you're destined for glory? But at this point in time, all you can see is the battle. All you can be conscious of is the warfare and the difficulty of it and the setbacks and the toil and the turmoil. And perhaps some of you are just like Naomi, "Don't call me Naomi," she said. "Call me Mara," which means bitter, "for the hand of the Lord has gone out against me." And that's where some of you are tonight: in the midst of a battle, in the midst of a war, in the midst of difficulty, in the midst of pain, in the midst of sorrow and suffering—and Paul has something to say to you, my friend. That, you see, that it's through that pain, and it's through that trial that glory lies beyond. The world may hate you tonight. And the closer you are to Jesus and the more resolute you are in your discipleship, the more the world will hate you. And beware when everybody speaks well of you. But here it comes, and the clouds are lifting now, and there's a marvelous sight of the glory, of the splendor. *And Paul says that the sufferings of this world are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*

And Paul may be implying one of two ideas here. He may be using a comparison of economics. He may be saying that the value of one can't be compared with the value of another, like a \$10.00 dollar watch from Wal-Mart can't be compared to a \$5,000 Rolex. Give me the \$10.00 watch from Wal-Mart anytime. But actually I think the comparison isn't economic, but the comparison is in the issue of weight. It's the language of the scales and Paul is saying...he says elsewhere in 2 Corinthians chapter 4, "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding weight of glory." That if you have one of these old fashioned scales, the kind where you have to lift weights and actually put them on the scales, that if you put the suffering, if you put the trial on the scale on the one and then you put the glory that awaits us on the other side, you'll see it always going down because there's no comparison. *Because the weight of glory exceeds whatever the weight of the trial may be.*

And you notice how Paul puts it in verse 18. He puts it this way, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed to us." "I consider it." And do you see what Paul is saying? And it's so important from a pastoral point of view; Paul is saying, 'This isn't just something that just comes to you out of the blue, this thought. No, I've considered it. I've thought about it. I've weighed it up in my mind. I've reasoned about it. I've drawn the conclusion that if I truly am a child of God, and I'm in union with Jesus Christ, and He will never let me go, and there's glory to come, and "eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have it entered into the heart of man what God hath prepared for those that love Him"... "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us."

You see, Paul is doing more than just saying, "You know, cheer up, why don't you?" You know, that's about the worst thing that you can ever say to somebody who is discouraged. You know, when you're discouraged and somebody says, "Cheer up," you know you want to pop them in the nose because that's the one thing that you can't do. And it's not something within us that cheers us up; it's something outside of us. It's the resolution of a covenant God that cheers us and encourages us and motivates us. Isn't that what motivated Abraham, that he persevered, "looking for a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God"? Isn't that what motivated Moses when he esteemed it better to suffer with the people of God than to enjoy the seasons and pleasures of sin for a season? Isn't that what motivated Jesus Himself "who for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross, despising the shame and (has) sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high"?

My friends, consider what's before you. You know, you may be in the battle of Helm's Deep. You know, the DVD has come out so it's all in your mind again. And there you look up into the hills, and there's Gandalf on the white horse with his armies coming to rescue, and Paul is saying something like that. 'Look up! Look beyond the affliction and the trial and the difficulty, because through this trial and through this difficulty there is glory that lies beyond!' That's what Paul is saying, 'Keep your eye on the glory which is to come.' You know, they say, where there's life, there's hope. Actually where there's hope, there's life. If you've got hope in your heart, if you've got that vision in your mind and your eye is resolute on the Savior, then there's life. So there's the statement; there's the thesis of the Apostle Paul: that the road to glory is via the pathway of suffering.

## **II. Suffering illustrated**

But, secondly, he illustrates it, and he illustrates it in two ways. He illustrates it, first of all, from creation. He says in verse 19, "The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God." "The creation"...and this is Paul's

language: the creation stretches out its neck; it's standing on tip-toe; and it's trying to see something. It's trying to behold something, and what it's trying to behold is the manifestation, the revelation of the sons of God.

Now, let's go a little deeper into what Paul says here because he expands this thought along three avenues, speaking of the past and the present and the future. In reference to the past, he puts it like this (verse 20): That "creation was subjected to futility" or to frustration. "Creation was subjected to futility" or frustration. Paul isn't speaking now about the original creation. He's not speaking about creation as we see it in Genesis 1 or Genesis 2: "And God saw all that He had made and behold it was very good." No, this is creation after the fall. This is creation as sin entered into the world. This is creation as the curse has come down upon it. This is creation where you have to work in the sweat of your brow and where childbirth involves pain and thorns infest the ground. Do you remember how Revelation ends in chapter 22? "Behold, there is no more curse. The curse is taken away." And Paul is saying there is something about fallen creation. There's something about the world in which we live that is subject to futility. It's the word that the Greek translators of the Old Testament, not the Old Testament but the Greek translation of the Old Testament, it's the word they implied for that famous word in Ecclesiastes that "everything under the sun is vanity," futile, purposeless. There's something about living in this world that is always frustrating. There's always purposelessness about living in this world outside of reference to God. It has no aim. It has no direction. It has no cohesion. It has no integration. There's a futility to it. There's something always holding creation back. It's subject to futility and frustration.

Remember in C.S. Lewis' Narnia Chronicles, *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*? You remember when Narnia, under the control of the wicked witch, do you remember one of the consequences was that the land was always in perpetual winter? Spring never came. Now you have to do as if an about shift, you know, cause the coming of winter in Mississippi is a delightful thing. To wake up last night at three in the morning and to be freezing was actually a pleasurable experience. But you understand that's not the way it's supposed to be. That isn't how the Garden of Eden was. And there's something, there's something about Lewis' portrait of it always being winter, as though the creation was always sort of held back; but when Aslan died and rose again, spring came and life came and blossoms came.

And then Paul goes on to say something about the present and he speaks, uses the word *groaning*. Actually he uses it three times. He says, "The creation groans" (verse 22). "We know that the whole creation has been groaning together in pains of childbirth." "The creation groans." And he goes to say that we groan, and he goes on to say that the Holy Spirit groans with words that are inexpressible, too deep for words, within us. The creation is groaning. It's a word associated with the pangs of childbirth and labor. The world is trying to give birth and it's a painful process. And then with reference to the future, he goes on to

say that the creation itself (verse 21) will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. It's subject to futility, it's trying to give birth, but in the future it will be released; it will be set free from its bondage and captivity. Frustration and groaning and bondage and captivity, that's the world in which we live: a world of pollution, a world of green-house gases, a world of solar flares and radiation and poison rivers, and an animal kingdom that is suffering and going into extinction. 'But one day, one day,' Paul says, 'it's all going to be different.' One day there is going to be...and he uses this extraordinary word, a *palingenesis*, regeneration, a coming into life again. That is extraordinarily like what John says happens to us when we come to faith in Jesus Christ, that we are born again of the spirit of God. Paul now seems to be addressing that concept to the idea of creation. There is coming a day when the creation, as it were, will give birth, when the creation will be restored, when the new heavens and the new earth will dawn. "And the lion will lie down with the lamb, and a little child will lead them," as the prophet says. And I know it's a picture. I know it's a picture, and I don't want to stretch it too far. But what a beautiful picture that is of the world restored as it was meant to be, of Eden flourishing again throughout the four corners of the globe, of a new heavens and a new earth in which there is no sin and there is no curse and there is no night! Well, that's the first example: creation.

But the second example is the sons of God themselves. That the principle of suffering leading to glory is reflected in the creation itself, but it's also reflected in the children of God. "But we ourselves (verse 23) who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." And Paul has just squashed together a whole number of issues there. He says, we are the first fruits; we "have the first fruits of the Spirit." And probably what Paul means is that the Spirit Himself is the first fruits. He's the guarantee of that which is to come. He is, as it were, the down payment of that which is to come. Like on the day of Pentecost, the Feast of Pentecost celebrating harvest time, that the first pickings of the tree were, as it were, the statement that there's a whole glorious harvest coming. And the Spirit within us is the guarantee of glory to come of union with Christ, of a life lived in the presence of God in the new heavens and in the new earth.

### **III. What we ultimately live for**

What Paul now remarkably says, and hear this, because Paul has already said on a number of occasions in Romans 8 that we are already the sons of God. We have already been adopted into the household and family of God, and yet there's something of a tension here, because although in a sense we already are the sons of God, we are not, as it were, the sons of God in all of its glory and in all of its fullness, because they yet await a manifestation of the sons of God. Now do you see and do you remember how John puts that? "Now are we the sons of God." There it is. There's the *now*: "Now are we the sons of God." That's a truth.

That's a reality now. "But it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him for we shall see Him even as He is." And that's what Paul is saying here, that we already are the sons of God. We have the spirit of sonship dwelling in our hearts. He is the first fruits, and yet we're not what we shall be. We're not yet what we shall be. And there comes a yet more glorious day: the manifestation of the sons of God. And it's as though Paul, as it were, is viewing the scene and the smoke of battle and the trial have long since drifted away, and what he sees now is Jesus in all of His glory saying to His Father, 'Behold My children. Behold My little ones. Behold the ones for whom I have died and shed My blood.' We are heirs and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ, and there is coming a day, Paul is saying here, when the creation will be renewed, when a new heaven and a new earth will dawn and there will be the manifestation, the manifestation of the sons of God. "The redemption of our bodies," Paul goes on to say. We are saying goodbye to some of our dear, dear friends in the church and yet another one tomorrow, a body lain in the ground. Yes, the soul in the presence of Jesus in that what we sometimes euphemistically call "the intermediate state."

But Paul says, 'You know, glorious as that truth is, that "to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord"...glorious as that truth is, it's like being unclothed.' And what we long for and the hope of the New Testament is not the soul going into the presence of Jesus, the center of our self-determination and self-consciousness in the presence of Jesus and the body in the ground. The hope of the New Testament is that that body will rise from the dead, and if Jesus comes before we die, the body raised into His presence, so that forever we shall be with the Lord as His adopted sons, body and soul. That's what we're waiting for, in all of its glory, in all of its magnificence. And do you see the inference that Paul draws? Do you see what he says in verse 25? "If we hope for that for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience," or perseverance.

I was reading a story of someone that I vaguely knew, a lady, a Christian lady called Mabel. And Mabel had been sick for a quarter of a century. For 25 years she had been sick and almost the whole of that time confined to her bed with disease throughout her body. And towards the end of her existence she was asked a question, "What do you think about?" "Jesus," she said. "But what exactly?" "I think about how good He's been to me, all the days of my life. And how one day I will get out of this bed, and I will walk to meet Him and fall down before Him and worship Him." That's what she said. That's what we were singing about in that wonderful Charles Wesley hymn. "Love divine, all loves excelling, joy of heaven to earth come down. / Fix in us Thy humble dwelling, all Thy faithful mercies crown. / Jesus, Thou art all compassion, pure, unbounded love Thou art. Visit us with Thy salvation, enter every trembling heart." And then that final verse, "Fix in us Thy humble dwelling; finish then Thy new creation; pure and spotless let us be. Let us see Thy great salvation, perfectly restored in Thee; / changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place, / till we cast our crowns before Thee, lost in wonder, love, and praise." That's what the doctrine of

adoption means. It's a doctrine that assures that one day we shall be with Him in glory, casting our crowns before Him. Let's pray together.

*Our Father in Heaven, in this week especially of thanksgiving, our hearts are full as we consider what You've done for us and what You are doing for us and what You yet will do for us. We thank You that we are Your children, that we bear the name 'Christians', that now are we the sons of God and it doth not yet appear what we shall be. We thank you that "eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man what God hath prepared for those that love Him." And we pray that You'd fill us with a glimpse of that glory which is to come, and keep us patient and in the midst of our trials to run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith. And hear us for Jesus' sake. Amen.*

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