

Romans 8:18,19 For I conclude that our sufferings at the present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ In fact, creation is waiting with eager longing for the sons of God to be revealed.

How many of you remember the old-fashioned scales? Like those scales that you see on Justice buildings or in movies about ancient times. Before we had digital scales, or the dial scales like you stand on in your bathroom, if you were going to weigh something, you would use one of these old balance scales. It has two shallow pans on a horizontal bar. The way it works is that you lay objects in each pan and it tells you which side is heavier than the other—or how much you'd have to add to one side to put the items into balance.

Now imagine if you were to put into one of those pans all of the trials and troubles, all of the sorrows and heartaches that we've experienced in our lives. Pile it all on! Are you suffering because of an illness...or a virus? Pile it on! Are you having trouble in your marriage? Pile it on! Are you struggling with employment problems? Pile it on! Have you lost a loved one? Pile it on! All your sorrow, all your pain, all your loneliness, all your struggle—pile it all on!

Why? Because in our sermon text for today, the Apostle Paul makes an amazing claim! He tells us today that no matter how great our sorrow or suffering, there is something on the other side of the balance scale ***that far outweighs them all.***

Listen to what he writes in Romans chapter 8: ***I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us!***

God wants us to climb the mountain of faith and look back down at our lives here

and get some perspective. Today, he points us past our pain, to paradise. I mean, if you and I wanted to get together and talk about all the troubles and all the suffering that have happened to us, we could talk all day, and then some, couldn't we? But I think to understand Paul's words here in Romans 8, we have to remember some things about the Apostle Paul.

This man who said ***that our present suffering is not worth worrying about*** wasn't some guy who led a charmed life. No, this was a man who knew what it meant to suffer. In his own words...***I've done more hard work, been in prisons more often, been whipped far more, and I've been close to death many times. ²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. One time I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. I have spent a night and a day on the open sea. ²⁶ I have often been on journeys, in danger from rivers, in danger from robbers, in danger from my own people, in danger from Gentiles, in danger in the city, in danger in the wilderness, in danger on the sea, in danger among false brothers. ²⁷ I have worked hard and struggled. I've spent many sleepless nights. I've been hungry and thirsty. I've gone without food many times. I've been cold and lacked clothing.*** (2 Corinthians 11:23-27)

If you want to talk about pain and suffering, Paul could go toe-to-toe with anyone, couldn't he? But all that suffering didn't surprise Paul. Why? Because you and I and Paul all live in a world that is suffering from sin. Yes, right along with us, Creation is suffering, too. Paul explains: ***In fact, creation is waiting with eager longing for the sons of God to be revealed.***

Basically, Paul is saying "If you want to talk about pain and suffering, well then you'd better throw in everything God's perfect creation had to suffer, too." Remember,

God had created a perfect world, but when we brought in sin, this world fell under a curse, too. Whether it's Dutch elm disease, or polluted streams; whether it's an oil spill or holes in the ozone layer; whether it's genetic decay or viral pandemics; this isn't what God had in mind when he looked at his creation and said, "***It is very good.***" (Genesis 1)

But that's the way life is in this now imperfect world. All of it has been tarnished and corrupted by sin. We will never be free of pain and sorrow here, and neither will this world. We can't make heaven on earth, no matter how much we concentrate on the good and deny the bad. We can't save our planet, no matter how ecologically correct we are, or how much recycling we do. This planet is doomed, because God says so. It's no wonder that Paul tells us later in chapter 8 that ***creation is groaning***... (:22)

There's an awful lot on one side of the scale, isn't there? But my friends, let's not dwell on this side of the scale. Let's get a little balance in our lives—we've got to add something to the equation. We need something in the other pan... Paul says, "Into the other side of the balance, drop in heaven."

He wrote: ***I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us!*** Or as he wrote to the Corinthians: ***our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.***

Heaven is so glorious and so perfect that human language can't begin to describe it to us in a way our minds can understand. That's why Paul has to use word pictures for us. In the Greek text here, Paul portrays all of creation "craning its neck waiting for the unveiling of the children of God!" Just picture all of creation, the trees, the rocks, the hills and valleys, all of the animals, wide-eyed with their necks stretched out

trying to peek around the corner of time into eternity—trying to see what things will be like in heaven! No more failing bodies; no more dead-end jobs; no more pink slips; no more crying; no more death. Heaven will be filled with the joy of our Savior, his warming smile and love, his perfect presence and constant strength. In heaven you and I will finally realize our full potential. We will be the people God wants—loving, caring, serving, and selfless. And unlike the temporary pain we feel now, my friends, that joy and that perfection will be forever! Again, ***I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us!***

I mean, look at the scales now! They aren't balanced. No, that pan with all our sorrows and pain, with all your troubles and mine, proves no match for the great weight—for the sheer mass of the joy waiting for us in heaven!

Author John David Mann puts it this way:

Imagine you are standing just outside your home, surrounded by a dense fog, so thick you can't see the other side of the street in front of you. You look to the right, then to the left, but you cannot see more than fifty feet in any direction. You are surrounded. How much water do you suppose it takes to create that blanket of fog that has completely isolated you from your world? *A few ounces.* The total volume of water in a blanket of fog one acre around and one meter deep would not quite fill an ordinary drinking glass.

How is this possible? First the water evaporates, and the resulting vapor then condenses into minuscule droplets that permeate the air. In that one-acre block of fog, one drinking glass's worth of water disperses as some *400 billion tiny droplets* suspended in the air, creating an impenetrable cloak that shuts out light and makes you shiver.

This is exactly what happens with certain painful or difficult experiences. Human beings are remarkably adaptable. Most of the time, when negative events occur, we are able to learn from them, shrug them off, and go on with our lives. The experience simply evaporates, leaving us a bit older and wiser. But not always.

Sometimes, especially when we are very young, we have experiences that we cannot shake. Even if they seem insignificant — no more substantial, you might say, than a glass of water — when these upsetting experiences evaporate, they then condense into billions of droplets of anger, fear, self-doubt, guilt, and other negative feelings, surrounding us with a suffocating blanket that suffuses every aspect of our lives for years to come. We call this *the fog of distress...*

And we, as believers, can let one cupful of sorrow and pain cloud our vision. We let one cupful of trouble blind us to what lies ahead.

And so Paul invited us to climb to the mountaintop today; to get up above the fog of pain and sorrow that can surround us. For there, we can look to where Paul is pointing. He's pointing us past the pain, to paradise.

Of course, until we are called to our eternal home or Jesus comes again, we do have to descend the mountain and go back to our journey through this world. But as you, remember that fog isn't permanent—it just comes in little patches. And it can't begin to compare to what's on the other side. Never lose sight of what lies right beyond this little patch of fog: the bright eternal light of life in heaven with God. This is our certain hope! This is what brings balance into our lives, knowing that the heavenly scales are undeniably weighted in your favor! **Amen.**