

Introduction

I'd like to begin by reading a small section of Ohio's Statute of Descent and distribution. It's O.R.C. 2105.06 (A): **"When a person dies intestate . . . the personal property shall be distributed, and the real estate or inheritance shall descend and pass . . . in the following course: (A) If there is no surviving spouse, to the children of the intestate or their lineal descendants, per stirpes."**

According to that section, when the survivor of my wife and I dies, our sons, Moses and Aaron, will inherit our home, cars, furniture, bank accounts, and everything else we own. It will be theirs come what may.

Romans 8:14-16, which I preached about last week, teaches that when we decide to follow Jesus, God adopts us as His children. And just as Moses and Aaron are heirs of their parents, Jill and me, according to verse 17, so we are heirs of our parent, God. We will inherit His estate just as Moses and Aaron will inherit the estate of my wife and me.

Which is where the Holy Spirit comes in. Romans 8:17-25 reveals He makes our inheritance from our Daddy, God, real to us. That is the fifth way that He helps us and what I'm going to preach about today.

Suffering with Perseverance

Look first at verse 18. Paul writes about **"the sufferings of this present time."** **"This present time"** refers to our lives on earth before our deaths. **"Sufferings"** refers back to verse 17 and suffering with Jesus. It refers to being persecuted for His sake. But apart from persecutions, followers of Jesus are going to suffer in **"this present time."** The world we live in and the people we live with in it are fallen. Those are the defining aspects of human life and make suffering inevitable. I came across a reading that articulates it well: **"Life is easier than you think. All you have to do is: accept the impossible, do without the indispensable, bear the intolerable, and be able to smile at anything."**

The problem is that most people can't do that. But you and I, as followers of Jesus and filled with the Holy Spirit, can. We can accept the impossible, do without the indispensable, bear the intolerable, and be able to smile at anything? We see that in the word "**perseverance**" in verse 25. That's God's call to us. Persevere when we suffer.

The first thing we need to do to answer that call of course is to understand it. To Paul, persevering meant much more than just enduring.

There is a field in the social sciences that studies what is called "resiliency." In that field, researchers study groups of people who have survived traumatic ordeals. Groups studied include 3000 POW's who experienced brainwashing in Korea, 550 soldiers who lived through captivity in Viet Nam, the 52 American hostages in Iran, World War II concentration camp survivors, victims of crippling accidents, and children from a variety of disadvantaged backgrounds. All the studies have shown what we would expect. The bad things that happen to people affect them in one of two basic ways. The first way is defeat. They survive but become lesser weaker people. The second way is growth. They not only survive but actually become better stronger people.

This condition of growing better and stronger through hardship, adversity, or pain is called resiliency. And that's what it means to persevere. It means to be resilient. It means to grow better and stronger through hardship, adversity, and pain.

Hope

Now look at verses 24-25. They teach us that it takes one quality of character more than any other to persevere. That quality is hope.

Dallas Willard defines hope this way. It's "**anticipation of good not yet here.**" That's an excellent definition. Hope is the anticipation of good that's not yet here. This hope isn't a wild desperate leap, like the hope for a Super Bowl that we Browns fans have. It's confidence grounded in reality. Based on "evidence," Hebrews 12:1 (KJV), it firmly believes in good that's "unseen" or "not yet." That's what hope is.

And as Paul makes clear in verse 24, it's essential to our salvation. That's because it makes us better and stronger when we suffer, verse 25. In the context of suffering, in other words, hope makes perseverance or resiliency possible. It empowers us to stay faithful to God and to do what is right. I'd venture to say this in fact. Without it, we'll act unfaithfully and wrongly when we suffer, and become lesser and weaker people for it.

Two Christians in their late 50's, Jim and Gene, lost their jobs when the Ohio Brass plant in Barberton closed. Jim didn't have hope. **"My life is over,"** he said. Gene did have hope. **"I'll open up a pizza shop,"** he said. Jim acted unfaithfully and wrongly. He turned his back on Jesus and had an affair. Gene acted faithfully and rightly. He remained an enthusiastic and joyful follower of Jesus. What was the difference? It was hope. It's by hoping that we persevere when we suffer.

The Glory To Be Revealed

But what is the ultimate object of our hope? What is the ultimate good that's not yet here but that we anticipate? Paul tells us in verse 17 and 18. It's our inheritance from God. That inheritance is eternal glory. That glory is to reign with Jesus forever in heaven.

That inheritance of ours is spectacular beyond anyone's ability, including Paul's, to describe it. But he tries in verses 19-22. He declares that our eternal glory is so spectacular that even creation itself, personified, waits eagerly for it. He also declares that creation will share in it. Just as it "fell" when man did, so it will be glorified, in its own way, when man is. There will be dogs, therefore, in heaven.

I have a month old grandson named Zechariah. Suppose God appeared and told me that Zechariah will someday play shortstop for the New York Yankees, be the best player the Yankees ever had, win 10 World Series rings, and be inducted into the Hall of Fame. Most would think that's a destiny of glory. But believe me. The difference between the

glory of that destiny and the glory of yours as a child of God is like the difference between the number 1 and the number zillion, only greater.

My point is simply this. We must have hope to persevere through our suffering. We must be confident of, firmly believe in, the good that is not yet. That good is our inheritance from God, eternal glory.

The First Fruits of the Holy Spirit

Let me ask you a personal question in that regard. Do you have that hope? If not, you can and the phrase "**the first fruits of the Spirit**" in verse 23 tells us how. It's through the Holy Spirit. "**First fruits**" refers to the things He does in, to, and for us now in this life that equip us for eternal glory later in the life to come.

Here are two of those things. The first is that He make us "heavenly minded." He works in our mental processes to help us believe that our inheritance is real. The second is that He makes us heavenly-hearted. He works in our emotional and volitional processes to help us feel and desire what we believe. The result is that we "**wait eagerly**" for our inheritance, verses 23 and 25. Believing in, feeling, and desiring eternal glory make it something that we're excited and passionate about now.

Richard Van Dyke tells a story that illustrates what I mean. A widowed father planned to take his little boy on a picnic and hike the next day. The little boy had never been on a picnic or hikes and was overwhelmed by the prospect of doing so. But he couldn't sleep as a result. So he got out of bed, went to his dad's room, woke him up, and told him he was too excited to sleep. His dad explained that it was going to be a great day but only if he got enough rest and sent him back to bed. A few minutes later though, the little boy came back and woke up his dad again. Irritated, his dad was just about to reprimand him when he exclaimed, "**Daddy, I just want to thank you for tomorrow.**"

That illustrates the fifth work of the Holy Spirit. He makes our inheritance as real to us as the picnic and hike were to that little boy. He makes us heavenly minded and hearted – so much so that we wait as

eagerly for our “tomorrow,” eternal glory, as that little body did for his. We have hope in other words, which empowers us to persevere.

Our Part

But as always, we have a part to play in the Holy Spirit’s work. That part is to give Him something to work with by doing two things, both of which verse 18 and its companion text, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, reveal.

The words “consider” and “compared” in verse 18 and the word “comparison” in 2 Corinthians 4:17 imply the first thing we do. Know the details of our inheritance. Understanding our eternal glory supports the Holy Spirit’s work of making it real to us. Not understanding it or misunderstanding it opposes that work.

After reading Randy Alcorn’s novel about heaven *Deadline*, a woman wrote him a letter. This woman had been a Christian since she was five years old and was married to a youth pastor. Listen to part of her letter: **“When I was seven, a teacher at my Christian school told me that when I got to heaven, I wouldn’t know anyone or anything from earth. I was terrified of dying. It’s been really hard for me to advance in my Christian walk because of this fear of Heaven and eternal life.”** Those are striking words, “fear of heaven.” But reading Alcorn’s book helped her to understand and changed her. She closed her letter this way: **“You don’t know the weight that’s been lifted off of me . . . Now I can’t wait to get to heaven.”** Her story teaches that understanding our eternal glory supports the Holy Spirit’s work of making it real to us. Not understanding and misunderstanding oppose it. So know the details of it.

We know those details by doing two things. First, study the Bible and learn the details it reveals. Second, use logic to identify the implications of those details. The Bible reveals a detail, for instance, that we will have resurrection bodies. Using logic, we can infer another detail from that one. Heaven will be a material world, our present universe renewed. One of the studies in our discipleship curriculum,

titled *Life after Life*, does what I just described and discusses scores of revealed and inferred details about our eternal glory.

We give the Holy Spirit something to work with by doing a second thing. Focus on the details of our inheritance when we suffer. Paul calls us to do just that by implication, here in Romans 8:18, and directly in 2 Corinthians 4:18. He calls us **“look at the things which are not seen.”** Those things are the details of our eternal glory that’s “not yet” here. We should preoccupy ourselves mentally and behaviorally with them. We should think and live in practice as if those details are just as real but far more important than the details of our suffering.

I counseled a fine Christian woman years ago whose husband of 31 years left her for another woman. She was devastated about several things, including this. She had spent 31 years of her life with this man and now, to quote her, **“I have nothing to show for it.”** But I tried to get her to know and direct herself toward the unseen thing. She did have something to show for it. God will judge and reward her someday for the outstanding wife she was to him. Her reward will be increased powers and authority that last forever. That isn’t just nice talk, it’s the truth and she needed to direct herself to it.

We now know what our part is in the Holy Spirit making our inheritance real to us. First, know the details about our inheritance, eternal glory. And second, focus on those details when we suffer.

Conclusion

I like the way C.S. Lewis said it in closing: **“I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that other country.”** He’s right. We should do that always, especially when we’re suffering. The Holy Spirit will make our inheritance, eternal glory, real to us if we do.