

“Waiting For Heaven”

Romans 8:18-27

July 19, 2020

We seem to do a lot of waiting these days. We wait for our food in the drive through line of a fast food restaurant. We wait for cleaning supplies to be restocked at the store. We wait for packages to be delivered from Amazon. We wait on the phone to speak to a live customer service representative. We wait for announcements from government officials. And we are waiting for this pandemic to end.

We even have waiting rooms at places like the auto repair shop or the doctor’s office, but I don’t think anyone ever looks forward to being in one of those rooms. My wife, Sue, recently had knee surgery and as I sat in the waiting room at the hospital and looked at the other people in the room, I don’t think anyone wanted to be there. While the room was very nice, filled with televisions, comfortable chairs, and work stations where you could plug in your laptop computer, the room was filled with anticipation. All of us in the room kept looking periodically at this one television screen that indicated with color codes and numbers if our loved one was still in pre-op, or actually in surgery, or was now in recovery. And I’m sure we were all wondering the same thing: “How much longer will it be before I can see my loved one? I hope everyone goes smoothly.” But the wait is worth it and you are relieved when you finally get the news from the doctor that everything is fine, the surgery went as planned, and you will be able to see your loved one shortly.

It would be nice if you could know in advance that the outcome was going to be fine. It might not make the waiting any easier, as I’m sure we would still be constantly looking at the television screen and wondering when the surgery would be completed, but maybe it would be a little more bearable, knowing that the waiting would be worth it.

Sometimes it might feel like we are living our lives as though we are constantly in a waiting room, especially during this pandemic. But as Christians we have some great news as the Bible tells us that someday our waiting will be over as our lives in this sinful world will come to an end. Do you ever wonder what it will be like on that day? Paul tells us in our second lesson for today that it will be glorious, saying in Romans 8:18, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

Now there are certainly many wonderful things in this life as God blesses us family, friends, and all kinds of good things to see, do, and experience. But right now many of us probably would not call this life glorious. In fact, Paul’s words in verse 18 describing the Christian life as “the sufferings of this present time” initially appear to be very appropriate for us today. But the suffering that Paul is referring to is not necessarily the suffering that comes from a pandemic or an illness. The suffering he refers to is the type that comes from living our lives as Christians, while battling against sin and Satan’s temptations. And that’s hard. Just think about all of the temptations and selfish impulses we face on a daily basis and how hard it is to do the things that God wants us to do. It’s a struggle to trust the Lord’s promises that He is going to use all things for our good when things at home or at work seem to be crashing down on us many times.

There is plenty of suffering and struggling that we go through in our lives as Christians, and sometimes the “glory” that God promises seems to be very far away. As a result, we might even begin to wonder if the wait, the struggles, and the sufferings are worth it. Maybe we even question at times if the “glory” God tells us about in His Word is really waiting for us at the end of our lives in this world. So in those moments, it is important for us to remember these words of Paul in verse 18, “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” There is nothing uncertain about the outcome. Paul doesn’t say that this glory “might,” or “maybe,” or “possibly could be” revealed to us. He says this glory “is to be revealed to us,” meaning that it will happen. In fact, the glory of heaven was certain even before we began waiting for it. Before the creation of the world, God saw you sitting in the glory of heaven with Him. But He also knew that in order for that to take place, we would need to change, we would need to be made ready for heaven. In order for us to live with a perfect God in His heavenly home, then we would need to be perfect. But we are not perfect and no matter how hard we try we cannot change our sinful natures to make ourselves perfect.

So God decided that He would be the one to change us. He sent His Son, Jesus, to this world as one of us and He lived the perfect life we were to live; and then He was crucified on a cross and died the death we were to

die for our sin. In Jesus, God changed and restored us to look just like Jesus. And that change takes place in each one of us in our baptism as God fills us with His Holy Spirit, who enables us to believe in Jesus as our Savior. That change also takes place as people hear the Word of God being preached, taught, and read to them, and the Holy Spirit then calls people to faith in Jesus through that Word. As a result of that gift of faith, we are then covered with Jesus' perfection, so that when God looks at us He sees a perfect person who is ready for heaven.

Therefore, the same thing that happened to Jesus will happen to us. I don't mean we are all going to be crucified on a cross, but just as Jesus' death was immediately followed by His resurrection from the dead and eternal life in heaven, the same thing will happen to us at our death. We will immediately be made alive again and we will live in God's heavenly kingdom forever – free from all sufferings and struggles. No more disappointments, doubts, or doctor's appointments. No more cancer treatments, hip and knee replacements, or disease. No more sinful nature to daily struggle against, temptations to fight, or guilt to carry. All of that will be gone as we will enjoy the glory that God has prepared for us in His heavenly kingdom. A glory that He sees you experiencing someday as He looks into the future.

It's kind of like getting a letter from the doctor with the results of your surgery before you even knew that you were going to be having surgery. That would certainly make the waiting room experience a little different. You would still have to sit in the waiting room, but you could do so with the confidence of knowing how it was going to turn out.

It's tempting while sitting in the waiting room of this world to lose sight of what we're waiting for, to focus on the suffering and the struggles of this life that we forget what is waiting for us. So to help us with this waiting and the circumstances of life, God gives us something that He doesn't give to the rest of creation. He gives us His Holy Spirit, to live within us and to help us in our weakness. The Holy Spirit is always with us to encourage us in the midst of the sufferings and difficulties that we will endure. And one of the specific ways that the Holy Spirit helps us is with prayer.

Sometimes the sin and destruction that we experience in this world can leave us speechless and unsure of what to pray about or to say. Sometimes we may not even know what we should ask for, or even what we truly need. So Paul tells us at the end of our text that the Holy Spirit knows what to say and ask even when we can't come up with the words or a thought. The Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf and helps us to pray to the God who loves, forgives, and cares for us; who has made each one of us holy and perfect in His sight, and who will make all things new.

Let us thank God today for our fellow Christians for whom the wait is over, who are right now experiencing the glory of heaven that we look forward to sharing with them for eternity. Let us also thank God that He has already sent us the "results," that indicate the wonderful outcome of all this waiting, which truly strengthens us in our sufferings. It is the glory of heaven that God guarantees is waiting for us that allows all of us to say along with Paul, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." Yes, despite the challenges and heartaches we all experience, the wait is all worth it.