

**GOOD GRIEF: HANDLING LIFE'S HURTS**  
**ALDERWOOD COMMUNITY CHURCH**  
**Romans 8:18-39**

**BIG IDEA: THE CHRISTIAN COMES WITH A BOMBPROOF WARRANTY**

*We are not necessarily doubting that God will do the best for us. We are wondering how painful the best will turn out to be.—C. S. Lewis*

I. SOME THINGS LOOK LIKE THEY ARE BROKEN (VERSES 18-26)

A. BROKEN THINGS

1. Broken Me: **VERSE 18**, *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*
  - Present sufferings
    - Christian evangelist **Wang Ming Tau** suffered over 19 years of imprisonment for preaching the Gospel in China. (Ravi Zacharias, *Cries of the Heart*, Word, 1998, 89) That's why *A third of the Christian church today must operate in secrecy, under the threat of extermination...* (per Richard Wurmbrand in Susan Bergman, "In the Shadow of the Martyrs," *Christianity Today*, August 12, 1996, 25)
    - 1915: **The Turks** slaughtered or expelled hundreds of thousands of Christians....In 1923, Istanbul's Greek Christian population was around 400,000; today, it may be only 4,000. (Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, Oxford University Press, NY, 2002, 170)
  - Eagerly waiting. **VERSE 23**, *Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*
    - *When a train goes through a tunnel and it gets dark, you don't throw away the ticket and jump off. You sit still and trust the engineer. (Corrie Ten Boom)*
  - Groaning. **VERSE 23**, *Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*
    - Quadriplegic **Joni Erickson** says, *Sometimes life is so hard for me that I would rather disappear. I'm not talking about suicidal thoughts. But I have days when I think, "I've written a bunch of books. I've encouraged people. God, you've used my wheelchair. My life has had impact on a few people. Can I go home now? Please, can I come home now? I'm tired of struggling with sin. I'm tired of prying the world's suction cups off of my heart."* (Dave Goetz interview with Joni, "Thriving with Limitations," *Leadership*, Winter 1996, 67-68)
  - Hoping. **VERSE 24-25**, *For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has?<sup>25</sup> *But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.**
  - Weakness. **VERSE 26-27**, *In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for...*

**Have you heard of the Stockdale Paradox?** *The name refers to Admiral Jim Stockdale, who was the highest-ranking United States military officer in the "Hanoi Hilton" prisoner-of-war camp during the height of the Vietnam War. Tortured over twenty times during his eight-year imprisonment from 1965 to 1973...*

Author, Jim Collins, caught up with him years later and asked him how on earth he coped with his imprisonment. *"I never lost faith in the end of*

the story," he said, when I asked him. "I never doubted not only that I would get out, but also that I would prevail in the end..."

Jim asked, "Who didn't make it out?"

"Oh, that's easy," he said. "The optimists."....they were the ones who said, 'We're going to be out by Christmas.' And Christmas would come, and Christmas would go. Then they'd say, 'We're going to be out by Easter.' And Easter would come and Easter would go. And then Thanksgiving, and then it would be Christmas again. And they died of a broken heart."

...To this day, I carry a mental image of Stockdale admonishing the optimists: 'We're not getting out by Christmas; deal with it!'"

In summary, the Stockdale Paradox says: You must retain faith that you will prevail in the end, and you must also confront the most brutal facts of your current reality. (Jim Collins, *Good to Great*, Harper Business, NY, 2001, 82-87)

2. Broken World. **VERSES 19-22**, *The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.* <sup>20</sup> *For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope* <sup>21</sup> *that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.* <sup>22</sup> *We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.*

- Eagerly waiting
- Groaning
- Bondage to decay

#### B. WHISPERS OF WHOLENESS

1. Firstfruits of the Spirit. **VERSE 23**, *we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit*
2. Holy Spirit intercession. **VERSES 26-27**, *We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.* <sup>27</sup> *And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.*
  - *It is impossible that any ill should happen to the man who is beloved of the Lord. Ill to him is **no ill, but only good in a mysterious form**. Losses enrich him, sickness is his medicine, reproach is his honour, and death his gain.—Charles Spurgeon*
  - *There is no situation so chaotic that God cannot, from that situation, create something that is surpassingly good. He did it at creation. He did it at the cross. He is doing it today. —Bishop Moule*
3. The glory that is to be revealed in us. **VERSE 18**, *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*
  - **2 Corinthians 4:7-18** *But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.* <sup>8</sup> *We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair;* <sup>9</sup> *persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.* <sup>10</sup> *We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.* <sup>11</sup> *For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.* <sup>12</sup> *So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.* <sup>13</sup> *It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak,* <sup>14</sup> *because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence.* <sup>15</sup> *All this is for your benefit,*

so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. <sup>16</sup> Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> **For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.** <sup>18</sup> So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

- Adoption of sons. **VERSE 23**, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our **adoption as sons**
- Redemption of our bodies. **VERSE 23**, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, **the redemption of our bodies.**

Here's a great line out of *Les Miserables*, as Jean Valjean gropes into the darkness of the sewers beneath Paris: *The pupil dilates in the night, and at last finds day in it, even as the soul dilates in misfortune, and at last finds God in it.* (Victor Hugo, *Les Miserables*, Modern House Library, Random House, New York, 1992, 1104)

## II. BUT MY WARRANTY SAYS...

A. THE PLAN IS WORKING. **VERSES 28-30**, *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.* <sup>29</sup> *For those God **foreknew** he also **predestined** to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.* <sup>30</sup> *And those he predestined, he also **called**; those he called, he also **justified**; those he justified, he also **glorified**.*

1. God Foreknew
2. God Predestined
3. God Called
4. God Justified
5. God Glorified

### LEON MORRIS: THE CHRISTIAN'S TRIUMPH SONG, 8:31-39

B. THE SHIELD IS IN PLACE. **VERSES 31-32**, <sup>31</sup> *What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is **for us**, who can be against us?* <sup>32</sup> *He who did not spare his own Son, but **gave him up for us all**-- how will he not also, along with him, graciously **give us all things**?*

1. God is for us
2. God gave up Jesus for us
3. God gives us all things

C. THE ASSAULTS ARE FUTILE. **VERSES 33-39**, *He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?* <sup>33</sup> *Who will bring **any charge against** those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.* <sup>34</sup> ***Who is he that condemns**? Christ Jesus, who died-- more than that, who was raised to life-- is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.* <sup>35</sup> *Who shall **separate us** from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?* <sup>36</sup> *As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."* <sup>37</sup> *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.* <sup>38</sup> *For I am convinced that **neither death nor life**, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, <sup>39</sup> neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

1. Charges against us. **VERSE 33**, *Who will bring **any charge against** those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.*

**Zechariah 3:1** Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. <sup>2</sup> The LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?" <sup>3</sup> Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. <sup>4</sup> The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes." Then he said to Joshua, "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you." <sup>5</sup> Then I said, "Put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him, while the angel of the LORD stood by. <sup>6</sup> The angel of the LORD gave this charge to Joshua: <sup>7</sup> "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'If you will walk in my ways and keep my requirements, then you will govern my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you a place among these standing here.' <sup>8</sup> "'Listen, O high priest Joshua and your associates seated before you, who are men symbolic of things to come: I am going to bring my servant, the Branch. <sup>9</sup> See, the stone I have set in front of Joshua! There are seven eyes on that one stone, and I will engrave an inscription on it,' says the LORD Almighty, 'and I will remove the sin of this land in a single day. [NOTE: The name Satan means "accuser.]

2. Condemnations. **VERSE 34, Who is he that condemns?** Christ Jesus, who died-- more than that, who was raised to life-- is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.
3. Separation. **VERSE 35-37, Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?** <sup>36</sup> As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." <sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.
  - Verse 36 is a quotation from Psalm 44:22. *The words in the original psalm express the perplexity of the people of God in the face of inexplicable suffering.* (Leon Morris)
4. Death/Life. **VERSE 38-39, For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,** <sup>39</sup> neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
  - *It was a crisp October day in 1555, a day that dawned like a thousand October mornings before, but a day destined to stand out among the thousands. Two men, refusing to recant their personal faith in Jesus Christ, would die a terrible death that morning. They would be burned at the stake. What crossed their minds, that fine autumn day, as these two men walked out of the doors of dreary Bocardo Prison and into the sunlight of their last moments on earth? We can't know all their thoughts, yet we have more than stones in the pavement to mark their passing. We have a few of their words as well. We know that as they approached the stake, Hugh Latimer turned to Nicholas Ridley and said, "Be of good cheer, Ridley. Play the man! We shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace...as I trust shall never be put out. (Stu Weber, *Four Pillars of a Man's Heart*, Multnomah, Sisters, OR, 1997, 31-32)*
  - *[T]he most aggressively Christian continent on earth, Africa, is also the hungriest, while the most aggressively non-Christian region, around the Arabian Sea, is the wealthiest. (When Robert Schuller compiled The Possibility Thinker's Bible, he found only fourteen verses to highlight in the book of Job.) (Philip Yancey, *The Bible Jesus Read* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 48)*
5. Angels/Demons {Phillips: *neither messenger of heaven nor monarch [archai=ruler] of earth.* **VERSE 38-39, For I am convinced that neither**

death nor life, **neither angels nor demons**, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, <sup>39</sup> neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The parable is told of an old dog that fell into a farmer's well. After assessing the situation, the farmer sympathized with the dog but decided that neither the dog nor the well were worth the trouble of saving. Instead he planned to bury the old dog in the well and put him out of his misery.

When the farmer began shoveling, initially the old dog was hysterical. But as the farmer continued shoveling and the dirt hit his back, a thought struck him. It dawned on the dog that every time a shovel load of dirt landed on his back he should shake it off and step up. This he did blow after blow.

No matter how painful the blows or how distressing the situation seemed, the old dog fought panic and just kept shaking it off and stepping up! It was not long before the dog, battered and exhausted, stepped triumphantly over the wall of that well. ("To Illustrate Plus," *Leadership*, Fall 1999, 81)

6. Present/Future. **VERSE 38-39**, For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, **neither the present nor the future**, nor any powers, <sup>39</sup> neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
7. Nor any powers. **VERSE 38-39**, For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, **nor any powers**, <sup>39</sup> neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
8. Height/Depth. **VERSE 38-39**, For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, <sup>39</sup> **neither height nor depth**, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
9. Anything else... **VERSE 38-39**, For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, <sup>39</sup> neither height nor depth, **nor anything else in all creation**, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This familiar poem by an unknown author wraps it up pretty well...

*I asked God for strength, that I might achieve;  
I was made weak, that I might learn to humbly obey.  
I asked for health, that I might do greater things;  
I was given infirmity, that I might do better things.  
I asked for riches, that I might be happy;  
I was given poverty, that I might be wise.  
I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men;  
I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God.  
I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life;  
I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.  
I got nothing that I asked for,  
But everything that I had hoped for.  
I am, among all men, most richly blessed.*

**C. S. Lewis** writes that the first two words we will say after we open our eyes in heaven will be, "Of course." *Now I understand. Now I see. Now it makes sense. Now it all comes together.* (Stu Weber, *Infinite Impact* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2007), 169.

**A PRAYER by George Mattheson:** *My God, I have never thanked Thee for my thorns. I have thanked Thee a thousand times for my roses, but not once for my thorns. I have been looking forward to a world where I shall get compensation for my cross: but I have never thought of my cross as itself a present glory. Teach me the glory of my cross: teach me the value of my thorn. Shew me that I have climbed to Thee by the path of pain. Shew me that my tears have made my rainbow.*

*When God wants to drill a man  
And thrill a man  
And skill a man,  
When God wants to mold a man  
To play the noblest part;  
When he yearns with all His heart  
To create so great and bold a man  
That all the world shall be amazed,  
Watch His methods, watch His ways!  
How He ruthlessly perfects  
Whom He royally elects!  
How He hammers him and hurts him,  
And with mighty blows converts him  
Into trial shapes of clay which  
Only God understands;  
While his tortured heart is crying  
And he lifts beseeching hands!  
How He bends but never breaks  
When his good He undertakes;  
How He uses whom He chooses  
And with every purpose fuses him;  
By every act induces him  
To try His splendor out ---  
God knows what He's about!  
--author unknown*

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