

Suffering: the Path to Glory 7-29-01

1Peter 5:10 2Cor 3:18-4:18

Some of us had the blessing of going to the conference in California and came back with some clarification on the work of the Holy Spirit in the church and in the individuals that make up the church. All three speakers, without planning it, were on this topic of God's work in us. The Holy Spirit often will emphasize a different thing to each of us because of our unique need, and the need of those with whom we share. I want to share a few of the things He spoke to me through the Word and his direction to the speakers.

Our main speaker had this verse on his heart: 1 Peter 5:10 (NIV)¹⁰ And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

In his first message he spoke on glory. We had a similar message in this fellowship about three weeks before that when we were in Romans 8. Romans 8:17-18 (NIV)¹⁷ Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.¹⁸ I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

Just what is glory? The speaker had said the full meaning of the word 'glory' can only be revealed by the Spirit. That's true. We see in the Word of God a few that beheld the Lord in his glory and they were on their faces, undone, radiant with the after glow. The Word tells us in 2 Cor 3:18 (NIV)¹⁸ "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." If we reflect His glory we are facing it. When the veil of rebellion is given up we see Him. And we see Him a little more clearly as we surrender in deeper and fuller ways. As we see Him more clearly we reflect more and more of that glory, being transformed into his likeness. This is God's heart for us. His plan is to bring many sons to glory, to the likeness of Jesus Christ. It is happening right now. You see the glory of the Lord to a small degree now in your brothers and sisters when they walk in Him, but in those who have been beholding Him for years you may see a greater degree of that glory. That's because they are further on the way to being conformed to the likeness of the Son. Romans 8:29 (NIV)²⁹ 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.

And this is what glory is. Glory is a translation of *doxa*, the Greek word used in the New Testament. Our minds all understand words a little differently. If I use the word glory you may think of a bright light, another might think of utter purity, someone else may be thinking along the lines of majestic power. We can only use more words to help each other comprehend more clearly just what we mean by a word, unless we have a picture or an object to point at. So we have the expression, "a picture speaks a thousand words". Go back to the 2Corinthians 3 passage, right at the end of the chapter, because there the Apostle Paul goes on to tell us what God's picture of glory is. There is only one real and eternal glory – that of God. 2 Cor 3:18- 4:6 (NIV)¹⁸ And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. ¹ Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.² Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not

use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.⁴ The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.⁵ For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

What picture did God give us to help us understand the wonder of the glory of God? His only begotten Son is the picture. We see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. He is the image of God. Jesus has gone to be with the Father 2000 years ago, so I don't have the privilege of seeing his physical face, but I don't think that is what Paul is talking about because Paul only saw it once on the road to Damascus. It knocked him off his horse and blinded him. In the first verse we read here he says we are looking at it right now. Are you? "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face..." What? Get this: Every time you hear from the Spirit of God as you read his word or He speaks to your heart and reveals Jesus – that is the work of the HS revealing Jesus – you are beholding his face. Did you get it?

Now, what do I see when the Spirit reveals Jesus? I see the glory of God a little more. And what does that look like? Well, it looks like Jesus, but what does Jesus look like? To see Him was to see love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, goodness, self-control. Glory appears as the attributes of God in the life of man. Jesus demonstrated them in a human life so we could see what it looks like for a man to exhibit the glory of God. We could go on and on giving illustrations of each of the fruits of the Spirit in the life of Jesus as everything He did and said was full of every one of those attributes. Pick any story and see – it is filled with them. And if you give the Spirit a chance to elaborate you will be in awe as you look into the face of Jesus.

What happens then? You are changed and show a little bit more of that glory in your own life. You reflect that glory you are looking at. Your words and actions (Jer 32:39) have an increase in glory: in love, in joy, in peace, in patience, in gentleness, in kindness, in self-control. You see glory when you see the life of Jesus flowing out of a brother or sister in Christ.

But this is a process – an ever-increasing one. One day we will look on Him as He is. (1Jn 3:2) We will be like Him. We will be clothed in the glory of God. This is God's goal for us. He is preparing a spotless, radiant bride for his Son. Now how could the Father walk us down the aisle until we are that bride of Revelation 21? So He is about the work of transforming you and me. What a work of grace! I think He wanted to show his greatness in choosing us. That transformation is only possible by the omnipotent God of glory. Yet, the word 'like' does not mean exactly the same. Ever-increasing glory goes on and on. The glory of God is infinite and so our increase in glory will not end when we see Him. Certainly it is the finishing of the old nature and old mind once and for all – for we do not even remember the former things, nor will they come to mind. But, I now believe, we go on increasing in glory throughout eternity.

He has chosen the most base and polluted things in all his creation (you and me) to demonstrate his wonderful attributes. He is going to take us from what we are to those prepared to be clothed in his glory and marry his Son. How can He work such a transformation in us? First He draws us by his grace to accept the work of the Son for our redemption, his blood shed for our rebellion. Then He fills us with His Holy Spirit that we might hear from and be directed by his very life. The Holy

Spirit reveals Jesus to us in an ever-increasing way. Then He continues to teach us not to operate in our own power but to live in Jesus and let his life flow through us.

The author of Hebrews tells us Jesus learned obedience through the things He suffered. In Philippians 2 we learn that when Jesus found himself in the body of a man he did what? He humbled himself and became obedient. That is a major part of the work of the Spirit in our life is teaching us the way of Jesus, our example. Jesus saw he was in the form of a human – without the sin nature – and knew the only way to live was to become entirely obedient to the Father. He knows the path of pride, of self dependence, has destroyed millions of men and angels. Since He is in the form of a human – one of his creatures – made to be dependent entirely on God, to walk with God and commune with Him, He sets aside any rights or privileges as the Son and just obeys.

I want you to consider something. When Jesus was in the garden He had a will to save his life and not suffer. “Not MY will”, he said. Was that sin? Absolutely not. He was without sin. But when He found his will and the will of the Father to be different what did He do? He said, “Not my will but yours be done.” He laid his will down and obeyed the Father.

You have a will too. Your old nature has been nailed to the cross with Jesus. Nevertheless you have a will, and desires, and emotions, that are not necessarily the same as the Father’s. His are glorious. His are perfect and right. His are full of the fruits of the Spirit. He wants to conform your will, desires, and emotions to be his – that is glory. Through your surrendered will comes his glorious will. You see, Jesus willed to choose the Father’s will over his own. That is what the Lord wants to do in you day by day. Again, the author of Hebrews says Jesus learned to do that (obey) through things He suffered.

Peter in 1Peter chapter 5 said, “the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.” Paul said in Romans 8 we will share in his glory IF we share in his sufferings. Do you think Jesus wanted to walk away from his town and his family? When He left Nazareth do you think He was saying, “Finally I’m rid of that place”? The Father told him to speak in the synagogue the truth that other towns and even the Gentiles would be more receptive. He told them what they didn’t want to hear but needed to hear. Then they tried to kill Him. Do you think He wanted to do that- lose his neighbors and for a time, lose his family? But look at the fruit the first day he arrives at Capernaum. Whenever Jesus set aside his will and did the Father’s He probably suffered, but then saw the eternal fruit that came from doing the Father’s will and not his own. He saw the glory of the Father coming through his human life and touching the world.

The God of all grace has called you to his eternal glory in Christ. First you will have to suffer awhile as Jesus did. Through suffering you will learn obedience just as Jesus did. You will see the fruit that it bears. Joseph saw that so clearly he named his son Ephraim (double fruit). Gen 41:52 (NIV)⁵² The second son he named Ephraim and said, "It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering."

One quote I will not forget from that conference, the one the Holy Spirit most impressed upon my heart, is this: “Suffering increases your capacity for Christ in you.” When you received Jesus you received all of Him but you were only capable of opening a small part of your life for Him to occupy. As you suffer you learn that it is best to open up more and more of your desires, of your will, of your emotions to the life of Jesus in you. You find that not only is it safe – but it is an increase in

glory. That means increasingly fruitful for the Kingdom of God. As the Holy Spirit reveals Jesus, you will see the areas in your life you have not yet given up.

The path our Lord takes us on is not the same for each of us. I want to illustrate what I am sharing with my own life but yours may have a different working of the same process. Don't look for the same details but the same process. I have told the Lord I want to be more like Him and I know the trials (suffering) work out the garbage, the worthless in me. They are like the refining fire that brings up the dross in the gold or silver. So I ask Him to bring it on. Then after awhile I am stumbling and frustrated and seeing just how incapable I am and I ask Him to back off for a season. I get to the place of where I can't take any more. He always lets up when I ask. Then after trying to grasp and comprehend what in me is causing this ugliness and forsaking it, I ask for those refining fires again. Then we go through it all over again. When I reach the end of myself I find I'm just crying out to Him to be my life, my thoughts, my desires, for mine are insufficient and His are glorious. And somehow He brings me through and my capacity for Him has been increased. I see how unnecessary my worry and my fear were for He is always faithful. The other side of the suffering is an increase in glory for through the suffering I had nowhere to turn but to look on his face. In desperation I spent days in the word and it came alive in my spirit, and my capacity for Christ was increased.

1 Peter 1:6-7 (NIV)⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.⁷ These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

God brings suffering to refine your faith so that when Jesus comes for you, your faith will be found to be genuine – result in praise, result in GLORY, result in honor. He's refining our faith – increasing our dependence on Jesus' life in us. That suffering is the instrument to cause us to yield to a greater measure of Christ in us. Outside of Christ our life is fruitless. In Christ the result is praise, glory and honor.

Now return to that passage in 2 Cor 4:7-11 (NIV). ⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair;⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.¹⁰ We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.¹¹ 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.

The treasure is Christ in me the hope of glory. Allow me to say it the way my mind grasps hold of it. Christ in me is the hope I have of my life expressing the fruit of the Spirit. As I yield to his life my mortal body will reveal the life of Jesus. The path He uses to help me learn to yield is often suffering. The time people are most likely to see Jesus in me is when I am pressed but not crushed; perplexed but not in despair; persecuted but not abandoned; struck down but not destroyed. They know that there is something more than just me carrying me through, for I am but a jar of clay. I die daily to my self (carry around the death of Jesus) so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in my body.

I just read an example of this in the testimony of Dr. Yu. During the Chinese persecution of Christians in 1956 he was interrogated. The political leaders wanted him to betray one of his

brothers. He would say nothing. They gave him a taped confession by the brother and asked him to just write down what the brother said and sign it. He would not. He said, "The brothers have overcome him (Satan) by reason of the blood of the Lamb, and by reason of the word of their testimony, and have not loved their life even unto death." (Rev 12:11) He was already a fairly weak man when they jailed him, though he was only 55 years of age. For 50 days they deprived him of sleep, interrogating him constantly. I can't help but believe that the guards must have seen Jesus in him. After he began to black out they knew he was going to die and released him. Within 21 hours he was dead. He preached that we should always walk in the presence of God. He lived walking in the life of Christ. He endured by the life of Christ. He went to be with his Lord residing in the life of Christ.

Dr. Yu is now clothed in glory. He is prepared to be the bride. Let us close with the rest of 2 Cor 4:12-18 (NIV).¹² So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

¹³ It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak,¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

¹⁷ For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.¹⁸ 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.

Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. In Romans 8 Paul said the suffering was not worth comparing to the glory to be revealed in us. So what do we do? Do we fix our eyes on the momentary, on the suffering? No! We fix them on the unseen, the glory to be revealed – Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. We have a joy set before us as He did. If suffering increases my capacity for Jesus – can we say – give me all the suffering I need to achieve the glory that far outweighs that suffering, the glory that is incomparably greater? This should change the way we look at illness, at trials, at the struggles within our fellowship. We so often pray to be delivered from things. Perhaps we would be wiser to seek the will of God in each and see what He is trying to work in us. If that trial is not of God certainly ask for deliverance. But if it is God's instrument to increase your capacity for Christ, we should count it all joy. That is the only way you can count trials as ALL joy. See the fruits of the Spirit increased in you as you yield to the life of Christ through the trial, and thank God you are being changed, from glory to glory, increasing in your capacity for the life of Jesus Christ.