

## **If God is For Us**

*To the Romans..., Pt. 17*

Good morning everyone and welcome to SWFF and our continuing look at Paul's epistle to the Romans – one of the most important letters in the history of *the world*, much less the Bible. We've been taking our time. We saw the first section – the first five chapters – where Paul lays out his theology of what's gone wrong with the world and what God did to fix it through His son, Jesus Christ – the gospel.

And now we are looking at the practical ways that theology allows us to really bring change into our lives. We're finishing up chapter 8 today and starting a new section next week. Next week we're going to have a mix of history, theology and even a little politics I'm afraid, because we're going to talk about Israel and why – and how - it still matters today. Next week will be walking through a minefield, so wear closed toed shoes! But for this morning, once again we ask, how does this good news of the gospel lead to actual changes in the human heart – the mind, the emotions, the habits of our day-to-day lives?

Now, last week we talked about suffering, and this week we kind of are too. The reality is, scratch below the surface of *any* theology and you get to suffering. It's perhaps the core issue of the human condition.

As long as at the end of your story, you *die* – suffering is a part of the deal. And how you handle the suffering that comes into your life depends on what you have decided about God. I'll give you an example. It's Mother's Day – I hope you all have a great day – but you know that as joyous as being a mother is, it also packs the potential for a good deal of suffering. All you have to do it look at Mary standing at the foot of the cross.

I read a story this week about a woman whose infant son had to have surgery. Some of you have experienced that very thing. We'd take the illness ourselves if we could, but of course we can't. It's a helpless, frightening feeling. Well this mother was anxious as well. And just before the nurses came to wheel her baby boy to the operating room, she looked at her husband and said, "We have to decide right now whether God is good, because if we wait to determine that by the results of this surgery, we will always keep God on trial." That's a wise mother.

But she's right and we all have to decide, and I think our passage today helps us with that. Let me read it to you, and we are going to find some of the most famous words in the Bible, some of the most comforting and inspiring words, and some of the most controversial. We'll break all that down, but first, let's hear it...

**Romans 8:28–39**, “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. 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. 30 And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

31 What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 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? 33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.

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. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36 As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels

*nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 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.*

Wow, it doesn't get any higher than that, folks! Some of the loftiest words in all the Scriptures. But it's more than just pretty poetry. If you learn to apply them to your life, these words will transform you. There was a man who reflected on this way back in the early 6<sup>th</sup> century, a philosopher/theologian named Boethius. I like to say his *full* name in case any of you new parents are looking for cool baby names, Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius!

If you ever took Philosophy 101, chances are you read at least excerpts from his book called “*The Consolation of Philosophy*”. It's considered one of the most influential books in the history of Western civilization. Now, later in life, Boethius got involved in Roman politics – got elected Senator actually. And can I tell you, that's *never* a good idea. Our Founding Fathers knew what they were talking about when they separated the Church from the State. You'll find pastors today clamoring to put them back together...don't you listen to them! I can tell you from history, that always ends in disaster. Always!

It certainly did for Boethius. Remember he was a theologian and so he tried to bring that into his politics – but the two don't mix well. And his truth claims ruffled the wrong feathers and he wound up paying for it. He was accused – most likely trumped up charges - of plotting rebellion; he was imprisoned, had all his property confiscated and eventually executed.

And it was while he was in prison awaiting his end, that he wrote his famous book. And the thesis question he poses is, if the world takes *everything* away from you, is there any way to maintain your equilibrium, your hope, and your joy in the face of that? And his answer in the end is yes, and as a Christian, he comes up with three basic things and I'm going to use them as our three points this morning, *but...*I'm going to make them a lot easier to understand than he did!

He says basically, if the gospel is true – if Jesus really did what the Bible says he did – and you believe that – put your faith in the gospel – then there are three solid bases for joy in spite of your sufferings. Here's what they are. Our *bad* things will turn out for good, our most truly *good* things can never be taken away from us, and our *best* things are yet to come. That's what Boethius tells us and it's what Paul tells us. If you know those, if you have those, you can face anything.

**First, Our bad things will turn out for good.** Not only does the life of Jesus make this possible, the life of Jesus *demonstrates* this truth. Think about it. Jesus is born into poverty. There's no room for him at the inn. He's born into danger. His family has to flee to Egypt to escape slaughter. But out of Jesus' poverty come the greatest spiritual riches. Out of Jesus' weakness come the most incredible power and strength. Out of Jesus' isolation and rejection comes a *people* brought together and united in the deepest loving unity.

In other words, out of terrible things, *through* terrible things, *because* those terrible things have happened, comes great good. And Paul says in **Romans 8:28**, “*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.*” All things, bad and good, small and little, big and momentous, all things work *together* for good to them who love God.

Now right away let me just quickly tell you what this is *not* saying. This is not a superficial, saccharine view of life that says, “Oh, behind every dark cloud there's a silver lining. Here are these bad things, but they're not *really* bad, if you learn how to look at them with a certain perspective.” No.

At the tomb of Lazarus...Jesus' friend Lazarus is dead. He goes to the tomb. People all around him are weeping. Jesus is about to do exactly what Paul is talking about in Romans 8:28. Out of all this bad, he's going to bring something good. He's going to bring glory and joy into the world that *wouldn't* have been there if Lazarus hadn't died. So he's going to bring good out of the bad. He's going to make it work out for good.

But he's not smiling at the tomb. Jesus doesn't come up to the tomb going, "Ha-ha, wait till you guys see what I'm about to do." He's not laughing. He's not saying, "Perk up, everybody, I'm going to raise him from the dead." He's weeping with those who weep. We're told he's angry at the tomb. He bellows in anger when he comes to the tomb.

You know, the view of Jesus at the tomb in John 11 almost forces you to think of Dylan Thomas the great Welsh poet's famous line. He says, "Do not go gentle into that good night...rage, rage against the dying of the light." And that's what Jesus is doing there. He's raging against the dying. Death, which separates soul from body, injustice that separates race from race or person from person, all things God has joined together, the things that divide what God has brought together are *bad*.

They're evil *in themselves*. They're not just, "Oh, they have a silver lining" or "If you just look at them in another way, they're not really bad." They're bad. They're terrible. God did not create evil – in fact, evil is the absence of God – but evil is submitted to God. He uses it. It's like how darkness is submitted to light. Turn on a light and the darkness stands no chance.

Of course, there are always shadows. What are shadows? A shadow is caused when something gets in the way of the light, right? This is why – while Christ defeated evil on the cross – evil still exists, there are still shadows of it? Why? Because we get in the way of the light. Nature gets in the way of the light. This fallen world and all who inhabit it are causing the shadows. And thus the groaning we talked about last week. But make no mistake, just because God uses these shadow things for good, doesn't mean they're not evil.

Jesus *hates* them. He's weeping. He's angry at them, *but* Romans 8:28 says the way God defeats those really, truly bad things is sum total, altogether, God is overruling, shaping, mastering everything so in the end God defeats bad because somehow He's going to make all the bad and everything working together to bring about good results in your life.

And the question you might ask is, “How?” And of course, I think there’s *one* way in which God does this which is relatively easy to grasp, and there’s *another* way in which God does this which is *impossible* to understand. The one way that’s fairly easy to grasp is actually right here. Verse 28 says he works all things for good. And in verse 29, he says his whole plan for us is to “*be conformed to the likeness of his Son.*” Now that’s the part we can grasp. And that’s this...

You may think your biggest problem is your circumstances. You may think, “My biggest problem is if I could just make the money, if I could just get the job, if this door would open...” You think your problems are the circumstances, but circumstances cannot destroy your life the way character flaws can. It’s your *character* that is your real problem. That’s what will destroy you really.

It’s foolishness and pride and selfishness and denial about your sins and your flaws and hardness of heart and *most of all* the false delusion that you really can handle life without God. All those things - those mistakes, those flaws in character - those are the things which almost always takes bad stuff to knock out of us.

I mean almost all of us who have been alive more than two or three decades or more - no offense to any youngsters - there are things that have happened to us, and we have scars. And they’re bad, and they still hurt. And yet the insight or the character or the strength we’ve gotten from it we wouldn’t trade for anything. That’s just a hint of what we’re being told here.

All kinds of bad things are going to happen to you through which God is going to conform you to the likeness of His Son, and there’s no joy without that conformity. You say, “Okay, is that it? All the bad things are just going to make me a better person?” No, that can’t be it, because there’s another sense in which God is obviously working all things together for good that will always escape us.

And you have to *know* it if you’re going to be able to handle the troubles of life. You have to know God is working all things together for good, and you *couldn’t* possibly at this moment grasp how. To me still the primary, premier place where you can see this – and I’ll speak for myself, I won’t confess your sins, I’ll confess mine.

If I were at the foot of the cross that dark Friday afternoon like a lot of people were, and I knew what everybody else knew and *only* what everybody else knew...Here was a really good man. Here was a man who had tremendous power to do good. He was healing people. He was feeding people. He had *enormous* potential, and yet he's *cut off* in the middle of his life, 33 years old, tragic death. It's clear that God had abandoned him. In fact, *he says* God has forsaken him.

So with all the facts everybody else had if I were there, I would've looked up, and I would've said, "I don't see what good God could possibly be bringing out of this." I would've gone home, losing my faith perhaps - at least shaken - because I couldn't fit *how* God was bringing enormous good - the cross was greatest thing God would *ever* do for the human race - but because it didn't fit into my little brain patterns and my little categories, I would've said, "I don't see what God could possibly be doing."

In other words, If you have an infinite God, of course that God could have reasons for allowing something that you can't understand. It's the height of arrogance not to admit that. So if that's what I would've done at the foot of the cross - and my guess is that's probably what *you* would've done at the foot of the cross - when *you* feel abandoned, when everything seems like it's happening to you, you can't see any good reason why it would happen, don't you dare make the same

mistake. Our bad things will turn out for good. Yes? That's one very important thing to grasp.

**Secondly though, Our most truly good things can never be taken away from us.** Why? Well, if anything, Jesus' life shows us the radical graciousness of God's salvation. The trajectory of human religion is, "I go to God. I have to ascend through moral effort and through transformations of consciousness or whatever. I must ascend toward God, and then God will bless me. If I live the life I ought to live, then God will bless me and save me," but the trajectory of the gospel is from God to us.

See, do you know what's at the heart of the Christmas story? God is basically saying, "You're never going to get up to me. I have to come down to you. You're just never going to make it." And therefore, Jesus Christ traverses the entire chasm between humanity and God. He comes all the way, right to us. And when Jesus comes, he comes poor and weak. William Billings is considered the first American choral composer and he wrote a Christmas hymn in 1786, *The Shepherd's Carol*, that says ...

Seek not in courts or palaces,

Nor royal curtains draw;

But search the stable, see your God

Extended on the straw.

God, extended on the straw! Too bad Boethius never heard this song – he might have thought twice about his politics. See, why does God come, not as a general at the head of an army, not as a king on a throne? Why does he come poor and weak? I'll tell you why. He does not come as a strong one for the strong. He's not a God who helps those who help themselves. Absolutely not! He comes for people who are weak and who can't *do* what we need to do, so he comes to suffer. He comes to die. He comes to pay the penalty for our sins. He comes, therefore, to give us love that is unconditional because it's not based in *us*, on any condition in us.

It's love *beyond* condition. It's love beyond degree. And that's what this passage is all about. So for example, look at that place where it says "he foreknows us." This is the controversial part. **V.29**, "*For those God foreknew he also **predestined** to be conformed to the likeness of his Son...*" This verse is the foundation for the whole debate over predestination vs. free-will. Does God pre-decide who's going to be saved? Or does every human being have a free choice to make of whether or not to accept God through Jesus?

Denominations exist over this question and there have been few issues that have caused greater disharmony in the body of Christ. And I'm telling you it's silly.

First of all, it's a very culturally conditioned debate. What do I mean by that? Well, this idea of predestination – most identified with Calvinism – only occurs in the Western world of theology. The idea never arose in the Eastern Christian world. You may know that in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century, the global Church split in two, The Great Schism – resulting in the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church.

For centuries, the two didn't even communicate – partly because the split coincided with the rise of the Islamic nation and the fall of Rome, so the world was *literally* divided between East and West. Another thing that made it hard to communicate – not surprisingly - was language. In the West, the main scholarly language was Latin and in the East it was still Greek. And their available Bibles reflected that.

So, many scholars would argue that the debate over predestination is in large part attributable to vagaries in translation. Listen to how one theologian explains it, "The Latin word *praedestinare* is a far stronger word than the original Greek *prooizein* which really means no more than "to mark out in advance"" (David Bentley Hart). 500 years of heated debate – people have lost *careers* over this – chalked up to a translation choice. It's a good reminder that humility should be a primary characteristic of a Christian.

So what do we do with “*those who God foreknew he also predestined*”? Keep this in mind. “Knowing” in the Bible is a very relational word. To know *about* something is a cognitive thing. To *know* something is an experiential thing. You can know about someone but not know them. Keep that in mind when you read celebrity tweets!

So to “foresee” relationally is a little like when somebody says, “The first time I saw her, I knew she would be my wife.” Now, most of the time, that doesn’t work out because we are finite creatures. But God is Omnipresent – meaning God is not bound by time or space. And so when *God* says, “The first time I saw you, I knew you’d be my bride”...well, God exists simultaneously in the past, the present and the future, so He can say that in the *now*, because He’s already seen the wedding in the *future*.

But the key that Paul is pointing to here is not about what God knows about the future or how God knows it. It’s about what God chooses to *do* with that knowledge. And therefore, when it says God foreknows us, what it’s really saying is not that He foresees us – like a fortune teller - but He “foreloves” us. God puts His love on us before we do *anything* in His direction. That’s how unconditional and aggressive God’s love is.

If you want a perfect example of it, the Prodigal Son. Here comes the Prodigal Son. Does the father stay on the porch, tapping his foot, saying, “This had better be good”? Does the father say, “*If* he repents, then I’ll shower him with love”? No. He *runs* to him, and he kisses him and pounces on him and showers him with love, enabling his son, making it far easier for him to repent. Our love does not evoke God’s love. God’s love evokes ours. That’s how radical and that’s how unconditional it is.

And if you say, “What about free will?” Well, we do have free will, inside the relationship that God has sovereignly created us for. See, God is not just a boss. He’s a Father. A boss can like an employee, but if that employee screws up over and over and over again, even the nicest boss starts to say, “How do I get rid of her? How do I get rid of him?”

But when a child screws up over and over again, all that does is make the parent more *intensely* concerned about the child. It *intensifies* the love of the parent. It *focuses* the love of the parent. The more they screw up, the more your parental love *explodes* in the direction of the child. And that means...what? These *really* great things you have, your justification - we talked about this - being made right with God, your adoption into the family, your relationship with Him can’t be taken away from you.

It says at the very end nothing in *all* creation - inside you or outside you - can separate you from the love of God. That means that the absolute Sovereign of the universe, to whom the galaxies are like dust on the scales, loves you with the unconditional intensity of a parent. That's the second thing, and the gospel shows us this. Your bad things will turn out for good. Your most truly good things will never be taken away from you.

**And, finally, Our best things are yet to come.** This is my favorite. Back in January, I attended the funeral of a man who was very dear to me. Like a spiritual father. He taught me to play golf actually. But more than that, he believed in me as a young minister. He was the District Superintendent – like a Bishop – who gave me the blessing to come and start this church almost 20 years ago. And so, even though COVID was going full blast, this was a funeral I had to attend. *Had to!*

So I donned a super-duper mask and joined the crowd of hundreds of people in the chapel – a chapel that was named after this man, he was a big deal. And when I made my way up to the casket, I had to laugh. Because there he lay in his fine suit...with a *fork* in his hand! And I thought, “Of course, how fitting!” because that came from a sermon illustration that he was absolutely famous for.

He used to tell about how his mama was a great cook. They didn't have a lot growing up in rural Mississippi, but what they had, she could turn into a feast. And at the end of every meal, she'd gather up the dishes, but she'd often say, “Hold onto your fork, the best is yet to come.” And that was code for a cake or a pie or some mouthwatering dessert she had baked. So hold onto your fork, because the best is yet to come. And he would use that of course as a metaphor for the Christian life. Whether you had a good life or a bad life, when the end comes – if you have put your faith in Jesus Christ – hold onto your fork, because the best is yet to come.

Isn't that good? Well, it's not just a good story, it's good theology. And we see it in the conclusion of that predestination thought actually. This is **v.30**, “*And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, **he also glorified.***” Walking through verses 28, 29, and 30, we see, as we already saw, God foreloves us - He puts His love on us - He calls us. He justifies us - gives us a right relationship with Him - and then God glorifies us. But actually, that's not what it says, is it? It's all past tense. That's not how we would talk.

Do you see what Paul is saying? Commentators have been noticing this for centuries actually. It's actually very striking. What you and I would say is, talking to Christians, "God put His love on you. God called you. God justified you. God pardoned you, and *someday* He will glorify you." That's not what Paul says.

He says he has *already* glorified you. Past tense. Past tense? Here's what he's saying. First of all, our future glory, because of what Jesus Christ has done, has been made *so* certain he can talk about it this way. It is *so* certain. You say, "How could it be that certain?"

There's an old hymn of the church called "*How Firm a Foundation*," and what makes it special is the lyrics are God speaking, so we are singing the words that God is speaking to us. And there's a verse that says...

The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,  
I will not, I will not desert to its foes;  
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,  
I'll never, no never, no never forsake.

That word "forsake" there is the key. How is it possible that God could never forsake us? Because Jesus on the cross said, "You have forsaken me." Jesus was forsaken in our place so we will never be forsaken. Or another way to put it is Jesus lost the glory. In Philippians 2, he *emptied* himself of his glory. Isaiah 53 says he had no *majesty* by which we should desire him. He *absolutely* lost his glory.

He became pitiful. He became small, shriveled. He became *inconsequential*. Jesus, on the cross, lost all of his glory so we could have it. Have it *so certainly*, so assuredly, that Paul can talk about it in the past tense.

Now, if that's the case, I believe Paul is saying, as I read this entire chapter - we talked about this somewhat last week as well. Here's what I think Paul is saying. Paul is saying, "I believe *so much* in the brutality of life. I do not have rose-colored glasses. I don't have a kind of mind-over-matter idea about this. I would never say, 'Oh, things aren't so bad if you just learn to look at it this way.' I *so* believe in the inevitable brutality of life that unless I *knew* there was glory coming to me, I would not be able to lead a meaningful life in the midst of all this suffering."

Paul is saying *only* glory makes it possible to realistically face how bad life is and live a meaningful life in the midst of it - even a triumphant life in the midst of it - only by knowing what we read last week in **Romans 8:18**, "*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with **the glory that will be revealed in us.***" Paul is always talking this way. Like in **2 Corinthians 4:17** where he says, "*For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us **an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.***"

What is he talking about? There are two things. This is how we're going to close. First of all, if you understand what Paul is saying, he's saying when we suffer in Christ, holding onto Christ, it makes us more real. "What do you mean, 'It makes us more real'?"

It makes us more real, because the word "glory" etymologically means "weighty or solid." And actually, if you think about this, we've been talking about this all through this series. Career is important to everybody. And so if you have problems in your career, it's going to shake you, but if you've completely built your life on your career, if your whole *identity* is in your career, then when something goes wrong with your career, you're going to be just shattered, devastated, no *you* left, no self left.

And that's the reason instead of putting our weight on things that are always shifting around and always shaking, when you put your weight on the Rock, when you root yourself more firmly in the love of God and what He says about you and what He has done for you, you become more solid. You become more stable. You become actually more *real*. That is to say, you actually become someone, who's going to last no matter what.

Suffering, *when* it gets you more deeply into God, when it *drives* you more deeply into God and into what He has done for you, it makes you more real. Now the reason I know Paul is right is because the Velveteen Rabbit agrees with him. When I was young, my mother would read me the story of *The Velveteen Rabbit*. The story goes that the Skin Horse says to the Velveteen Rabbit, "When a child loves you for a long, long time, then you become real." "Does it hurt?" asks the Velveteen Rabbit.

"Oh yes," says the Skin Horse. "That's why it doesn't happen to those who break easily or who have to be very carefully handled. By the time you are real, most of your hair has been loved off and your eyes drop out and you get really loose in the joints and you look awfully shabby, but once you are real, you can't be ugly except to the people who don't understand."

See first of all, suffering is actually making you more glorious *now*. Your inward person is being renewed day by day. It's preparing a weight of glory now. Think of the opposite, what do we say about someone who hasn't experienced much in life? They're a "lightweight". You don't want to be empty, you want to have *substance*. And substance is heavy.

But not only that, the future glory *overwhelms* as we think about it - Paul says, “For I *reckon* that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” - the future glory *overwhelms* and puts perspective and enables us to face what we have in front of us. That’s the reason why Saint Teresa of Avila was able to say the *first* kiss from Jesus, the first *second* of glory, is going to make all the suffering you’ve ever experienced seem like one night in a bad hotel.

I did a lot of reading during the pandemic. I always do a lot of reading, but I’ve read more great works of literature in the past year than I have in some time. And one of them was Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s great novel *The Brothers Karamazov* – it’s nearly a work of theology.

There is a scene in which two brothers are talking about suffering. Ivan Karamazov is talking about there being any possibility that we can make sense of suffering, and here’s what he says: “I believe like a child that suffering will be healed and made up for, that all the humiliating absurdity of human contradictions will vanish like a pitiful mirage...that at the moment of eternal harmony, something so precious will come to pass that it will suffice for all hearts, for the comforting of all resentments, for the atonement of all the crimes of humanity, for all the blood that they've shed; that it will make it not only possible to forgive but to justify all that has happened.” That’s awfully radical, but *something* like that is what Paul is talking about.

Now, let me draw it all together. Do you understand this suffering can *already* be making you glorious and someday we’ll be overshadowed by the glory that is to be revealed? Let me give you an even longer book quote to illustrate it. This week I read a book by C.S. Lewis called *The Great Divorce* – no it’s not a book about marriage! But it is an allegory about heaven...and hell...and something in between, *sort of*.

You have to take it as a work of fiction, but it is amazing. I hadn’t read it in decades and I was blown away by it again. You really should read it – don’t read Dostoyevsky, you’ll go insane – but *do* read Lewis, it’s only like 120 pages. You read it and then we can get together and try to figure out what it *means*! It’s kind of like the Book of Revelation, lot’s of hidden symbolic meaning.

It’s about a bus full of ghosts from hell taking a field-trip to heaven – or at least *near* heaven - again, work of fiction! But near the end we see one ghost – see they don’t have any weight, any glory, so they are shadow figures – and the ghost is kind of looking longingly toward heaven – up in the mountains. And on his shoulder is this little red lizard. And the ghost wants to go forward, but lizard doesn’t want to go. So the ghost is kind of sadly turning to leave.

And an angel comes down to meet him. And the angel says, “Off so soon?” The ghost says, “Well, this little fellow here doesn’t really want to go in that direction, and he’s kind of talking me out of it.” And the angel says, “Would you like me to make it be quiet?” The ghost says, “Well, that would be a relief.” “Then I will kill him,” said the angel.

“Oh, you didn’t say anything about killing it.”

“It’s the only way. May I kill it?”

“Well, let’s discuss that.”

“There is no time. May I kill it?”

“Oh, look. It has gone to sleep. I’m sure it won’t be any trouble anymore.”

“Yes, it will. May I kill it?”

“Well, I think the gradual process is always better than...”. “No, the gradual process is of no use at all. May I kill it?” “Get back. You’re hurting me. You didn’t tell me it would hurt me.” “I never said it *wouldn’t* hurt you. I said it wouldn’t *kill* you. May I kill it?”

“Look, let me run back by tonight’s bus and get an opinion from my own doctor, and then I’ll come to you the first moment I can.” “This moment contains all moments. May I kill it?”

Then the lizard began chattering to the ghost so loud everyone could hear what it was saying. “Be careful,” it said, “He can do what he says. He can kill me, and then how would you live without me? He doesn’t understand. I admit I’ve sometimes gone too far in the past, but I promise I won’t do it again. I’ll be very good.”

“May I kill it?” said the angel. “Damn and blast you! Go on, get it over with,” bellowed the ghost: but ended whimpering, “God help me. God help me.”

The next moment the angel grabbed hold of the lizard and broke its neck and threw it down. The ghost screams, and two amazing things happen. First of all, the ghost stops being ghostly and becomes radiant and gorgeous and bright and real and a human being, a man. But the body of the red lizard, instead of disappearing, grows into a beautiful, powerful white horse – the greatest stallion you’ve ever seen.

And the text goes on, “When the new-made man arose, I thought his face shone with tears, but it may have only been the liquid love and brightness which flowed from him. In joyous haste, the man leaped upon the horse’s back...they were off...like a shooting star on the green plain and were soon to the mountains. Then, still like a star, I saw them winding up, scaling what seemed impossible steep, quicker every moment till near the dim brow of the landscape, so high that I must strain my neck to see them, they vanished, bright themselves into the rose-brightness of that everlasting morning.” (101)

“For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison...” “I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor anything to come, nor height, nor depth, nor anything in all creation is able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Let's pray...