

A Christian's Joy

Happy, Happy, Sad, Sad, Pt.1

Happy New Years everyone. Welcome to 2023. I don't know about you, but I find this time of year to be one of complex emotions. We're coming off the highs of Christmas – at least the *expectations* of highs. If you're wrestling with melancholy at Christmas, there's almost nothing worse. And then of course, even if you *were* in high spirits, it all goes away so quickly. We spent three days at my parents house in Ft. Worth last weekend and when we left on Monday, we were driving through Waco, when my mom called...just to say that she missed us and it was lonely in the house – we were in *Waco!*

But that's how the Christmas blues work. And then there's the New Year with all it's promise. It seemed like I talked to an inordinate amount of people recently who were ready for 2022 to be over – just a tough year. But of course, any rational person knows there's no guarantee things won't be even worse in the next year. A calendar is a rather arbitrary thing after all.

So we have these mixed emotions and if you're a Christian, I believe they are actually compounded. Because if you're a Christian - and even if you're not a Christian - you know Christianity is *supposed* to be about joy. And probably everybody has some understanding that Christian joy is supposed to be there *in spite of* circumstances.

The Bible says there is a joy available that is not supposed to be subject to circumstances. And I always have to wrestle with that this time of year. So before we get to our winter series, I wanted to take a couple of weeks here at the start to talk about these complex emotional dynamics. Because the Bible very clearly says there *is* a joy available, and that joy should make us *at least* quietly happy no matter what the circumstances.

That there's a joy that the deepest trouble can't put out and, if properly nourished and properly nurtured, can coexist and even overwhelm the greatest grief. Now there are plenty of places where that's just stated. You know, in John 17, Jesus prays to his Father – it's the night before he will be crucified - and he prays for us. He prays for his followers. And he says, (**John 17:3**), I pray, “...*that they may have the full measure of my joy within them.*”

And one chapter earlier, he is speaking to the disciples, and he says, (**John 16:22**), “*You will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.*” Now that's pretty amazing. He knows who he is talking to. He is talking to his 12 disciples - men who are going to be persecuted. They're going to be robbed of everything they own. They're going to be tortured. They're going to be put to death.

And Jesus says, “I am giving you a joy now that can stand up to *that*. It can stand up to *anything*. None of these things - disease and persecution and alienation and loneliness and torture and even death – *nothing* will be able to take it away.” On New Year’s Day, I sit around, and I wonder, “Do I have that kind of imperviousness about my joy?” And the truth is I don’t. Why not? Partly because I don’t think we understand the nature of this. We see this promised in a number of places, but what is it really made of? How does it really work?

So we’re going to look this morning at a very famous verse from Paul’s letter to the Christians in Rome. We started 2021 by spending half the year in Romans – don’t worry, this is just one week. But Romans chapter 8 is all about living in a suffering world, living in a world of brokenness. In **v.18**, Paul says, “*I consider that our present sufferings ...*” That’s his subject; sufferings. And a little bit later, he is talking about trouble and persecution and nakedness and poverty and danger. He is talking about how we live in a world like that.

And that brings us to our thesis text for this morning. Three short – but powerful – verses. Let me read them to you. **Romans 8:28–30**, “*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. 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.

There it is. And in these three very, very famous verses I believe you’ve got the heart of it. In these three verses, you have three principles. That is, Christians can have this kind of impervious and relentless joy because of these three things. There are three reasons for this kind of happiness and joy. I’ll put it this way. Your joy will be strong to the degree you understand and grasp these three things. Now here’s what they are. There is one in each verse. Verse 28: *our bad things turn out for good*. Verse 29: *our good things can never be lost*. And verse 30: *the best things are yet to come*.

Paul tells you if you follow Christ, your bad things turn out for good, your good things cannot be lost, and your best things are yet to come. Those are the reasons for your joy. Those are the things you have to *grasp* and plant. This is the basis for your joy. Do you understand those three things? Let me help.

Number one; Our bad things turn out for good.

Verse 28. Now I have to say our translation we use - the New International Version, the NIV - is a little weak here, and I’m not sure why. But let me give you a real literal translation of what was written in the book of Romans in Greek. It’s rendered here in English, but here’s the literal translation. It says, “For those loving him, God works together all things for good.”

To those loving him, God works together all things for good. This is a very, very famous line – many of you probably have it memorized - but let me give you an A, B, C implication of this first principle. Three implications. First of all, it says all things happen to Christians. And this is, by the way, extremely important for you to understand this if you're going to have a kind of relentlessness and an imperviousness to your joy. Okay?

The first thing this tells us is Christians' circumstances are *no better* than anybody else's. The first thing this tells us is terrible things happen to people who love God. Many Christians explicitly teach - and most Christians implicitly believe- that "If I love God and if I serve God, then I will not have as many bad things happen to me. There are terrible things that can happen, you know. There are horrible things that can happen, but they're not all going to happen to me. No, because I believe. I serve. I love God. So these things are not all going to happen to me. By and large, my circumstances will be better."

And this text tells us and experience shows us that's just not true. All the same things that happen to everybody else will happen to people who love God. All the same things. Now if you want to know what "all things" means, it really means all things.

A little further down in v. 35, Paul asks a question and then offers a number of examples. Look at it, "*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?*"

Now look at those things. Trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, sword. What is Paul saying? Paul is saying *all* the same stuff that happens to *everybody* else will happen to you. If you love God, all things happen to you. That's the first thing. It's very, very important for you to realize that. It's not like *some* things will happen; mainly good. Not as many bad things will happen. No. *All* things will happen.

The second implication is this also tells us when things work together for good in your life it's because of God. Notice Paul does not say *things* work together for good. They never work together for good on their own. A Christian understands this about life. If anything is going well, it's because God is working it together. Again, if you go up a little higher in chapter 8, you'll learn this: things fall apart. Because in 8:18–20, Paul is talking about the fact that the nature of the world is presently subject to evil - because the world is burdened down with evil and sin - things fall apart. Things are subject to decay.

Everybody - I'm talking about everybody in this room - who has a body, eventually it's going to fall apart. Why? It's the nature of things. Go to the beach. You know the little tiny grains of sand on the beach? They were once a mountain. Everything erodes. Everything falls apart, but not just mountains. So do relationships and so do families. Everything falls apart. Things do not simply come together over time. They do not work together.

And what this is telling us is Christians get rid of the sweet, sentimental idea that things ought to go right, that things do go right, that that's the norm. Modern Western people believe, "If things have gone wrong, I'm going to sue." Why? Because things *ought* to go right. Christians have gotten totally rid of that idea.

Christians say, "If my health is intact today, it's God holding it up. If there is somebody to hug me today, if there's somebody to squeeze my hand, if there's somebody who loves me and somebody cares about me in spite of the fact of all my flaws, in spite of the fact of all my selfishness, in spite of all these things, you see, if there's someone who loves me today at all, it's God doing that. It's God holding it up. There's no reason for it otherwise."

If anything goes well, it's a miracle of grace. That's the second thing we learn here. These are three implications of this very first important thing to understand – still in the first principle. The third thing, C, is the most basic, and that is, though bad things happen, they work for good. That's the promise to those who love God. The promise to those who love God is *not* that you will have better circumstances. No! It doesn't say better things will happen to you.

This also doesn't say bad things are really good things. Oh no! Boy, I tell you. An endless source of insight for me is Jesus standing before this tomb of Lazarus. When Jesus was in front of the tomb of his friend, he was about to raise Lazarus from the dead. He knew a miracle was coming. But he was not smiling. He was angry, and he was weeping. Why?

Why didn't Jesus Christ say, "Ya'll think this is a tragedy. Nah cuz. I'm about to raise him from the dead. This looks like a bad thing. But it's not a bad thing. It's really a good thing. It's a way for me to show my glory. It's really exciting. I can't wait"? No! He is weeping at the tomb. Why? Because the bad thing he is about to work good *is* bad. It's death. It's bad in itself.

See, this does not give you a sickly sweet view that says, “Well, these bad things are really blessings in disguise. Every cloud has a silver lining.” Oh no! The Bible never says anything like that. These are bad things! They’re bad. They are *working* for good. That means God will give them good effects in your life, but they’re bad. Listen, Jesus Christ, being mad at the tomb of Lazarus, proves that he hates death. He hates loneliness. He hates alienation. He hates pain. He hates suffering.

He hates it *so* much he was willing to come into this world and experience all of it himself so that eventually he could destroy it without destroying us. That’s how much he hates it. This is not a sugar-coated view. The promise is not, “If you love God, you will have more good things happen.” No! The promise is not, “If you love God, the bad things really aren’t bad. They’re really good things.” No!

The promise is that God will take the bad things, and he will work them for good *in the totality*. It says *all* things work together for good. Now do you know what this means? This means don’t wait a week. It doesn’t mean, “Well, something bad happened. Okay. I’ll give God a week to show me how this is going to turn out for good.” Don’t wait a month. Don’t wait a year. Don’t wait a decade. The promise isn’t for a month or a year or a decade.

The promise is not that any bad patch in your life, if you bracket it, you can see how that works out for good. No. The promise is taken in the totality of all of your life and the whole of everything, God promises if you love Him, He will make sure it works for good. What does that mean? Well, the best summary anybody has ever come up with is John Newton’s summary.

The former slave trader who, after a radical salvation, became an abolitionist who wrote *Amazing Grace*, he’d seen the bad and the good in life. And He says what this is promising is, “All shall work together for good: everything is needful that He sends; nothing can be needful that He withholds.” The premise is that the things that *really* hurt you and really kill you are foolishness, pride, selfishness, hardness of heart, denial of your flaws and weaknesses, and the belief that you don’t need God. Those are the only things that can hurt you in the long run. Those are the only things that can hurt you in the totality of your life.

In the short run, selfishness feels great. In the long run, it will destroy you. In the short run, self-deception is wonderful. We all know that. In the short run, just closing your eyes to difficult truth is great. In the long run, it kills you.

Therefore, here's what John Newton is saying, and here's what Paul is saying. The things you think are good, if God has withheld them, they would only be good in the short run but terrible in the long run. Good in the micro, not in the macro. You see, good in the partial but not in the whole.

And any bad thing - and the bad things God hates - God will allow only in order to cure you of the things that can really destroy you in the long run, in the totality. That's the first principle. Do you understand this principle? Do you realize how practical this is? Remember I said you will only have this impervious joy if you hold on to these three principles. The first one is bad things will happen to you. We shouldn't be shocked. We shouldn't be surprised.

One of the main reasons, I think, why a lot of Christians are continually overthrown is not because bad things are happening to them. At least 50 percent of their discouragement and their despondency is the *surprise* that the bad things have happened to them. Do you see the distinction? Fifty percent of the reason we get so despondent is we're shocked! We say, "This isn't how it's supposed to be!"

We may say, "Life should be better." That's not what the promise is. Or we say, "I love God. Therefore, surely I will have more good circumstances happen."

That's not what the promise is either. And until you understand what the promise is, you're going to be continually shocked, continually amazed, continually overthrown. Your joy is always going to be overthrown, but if you understand what's going on, this is what's amazing.

Jonathan Edwards – it's an 18th Century kind of day I guess – he wrote a sermon called "Christian Happiness" and he says if you understand, Romans 8:28, then a Christian "...may look down upon all the whole army of worldly afflictions under his feet...and consider with himself and joy therein that, however great they are and however numerous, let them all join their forces together against him and put on their most rueful and dreadful habits, forms and appearances, and spend all their strength, vigor and violence with endeavor to do him any real hurt or mischief, and **it is all in vain.**"

That's the first principle. Do you see that? If you hold on to this first principle, first of all, you will practice routine praise. If you go through a day and your health is intact and things go well, if *anything* is going well in your day, you'll be praising God. Routine praise. When bad things happen, you won't be shocked. You'll become incredibly patient. Praise in the good time, patient in the bad. How does that sound?

If you're willing to sit back and look at the whole picture, like Jonathan Edwards says, you can actually say, "Come on, graves. Come on, diseases." See? "The lower you lay me, the higher you'll raise me. The more you try to destroy me, the more you will make me." That's what it says. Do you believe that? Do you understand that? First principle -our bad things work out for good.

The second principle; The good things we have cannot be lost. Now the first thing we have to address is what do we mean by "good things". Right away! Because I know how people use this. You know. If you've been a Christian for any period of time, you will know Romans 8:28 is one of those verses that people put in a "blessing box". When things get a little shaken they pull it out - rip it out of any discernible context. And they use it to do what we just spent the whole first point saying your shouldn't do.

"All things work together for good," they say, "Oh how wonderful! This bad thing has happened, but the good thing is right around the corner. I didn't get into the grad school I wanted to get into, but there's a *better* grad school for me somewhere." "I didn't marry the girl - or I didn't marry the guy - I wanted to marry. Ah, but there's a *better* one for me somewhere."

Now listen. That's *not* the promise. Let's face it. That's not the promise. I'll tell you something. I have avoided stories like that in this sermon, and I will continue to. When somebody says, "I can tell you a

story. We wanted children and there were complications for many years – there were infertility treatments and miscarriages and tears. But then God provided our miracle child and look at this wonderful family." And you know what? That is wonderful. Thank you, Lord. But that is not the promise. That is utter grace, but there are plenty of people who wanted children and it never did work out for them.

How dare I say, "What a wonderful testimony! This is how God always..." That's wonderful, and it might still work out that way in your case...but it may not. That's not the promise, because there's a little word after verse 28 into verse 29 which shows verses 28 and 29 go together.

They're not supposed to be taken away from each other. It's the little word "for". That means verse 29 *explains* verse 28. That means they're connected. That means they must not be pulled out.

And here's what it says, **(v.28-29)** "*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. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son ...*" Now this is the principle. The second principle is God does not promise you better life circumstances if you love Him; God promises you a better life.

He doesn't promise you better life circumstances; He promises you a better life. He doesn't say the good...What is the good? You say, "Ah! If I don't get into this grad school, I'll get into a better grad school." Grad school is a circumstance. See? Marriage is a circumstance. We're talking about a joy that goes above and beyond circumstance. Jesus Christ says to the disciples who will lose *all* of those things, "I can give you a joy that's not dependent on those things." So how dare we interpret verse 28 as a joy that is dependent on those things? No!

What it says is this. And here's the principle. Jesus Christ did not suffer so you would not suffer but so when you suffer, you'll become like him. The Bible does not, Christianity does not, the gospel does not promise you better life circumstances. It promises you a better life. Somebody says, "Oh my goodness! What's the difference?" Ah! We're exposed, are we not? Suddenly we realize we don't know the difference, but the Bible certainly knows the difference.

In verse 29, we're told what "the good" is. We're told what it is that every single thing that happens to you is moving you toward. And to get us there, Paul uses the word "predestined". Now that's a loaded word in theological circles. Whole denominations rise and fall on that word.

But I want you to stand back and look, and understand that Paul is introducing the word not in order to confuse you, not in order to explain the word, not in order to raise all the issues that bother people when this word comes up. He is using this word to comfort us.

I'm going to say we should listen to Paul instead of imposing our agenda on this for a second. This isn't a sermon about the difficulties of the word "predestination". This is a sermon about the certainties of it, because Paul says, "I want you to know something." Something that is predestined is fixed. Right? It's fixed. If you love God, there is something *absolutely* fixed no matter what. Okay. That's all he is trying to get across right now. So what is it?

Another word, "conformed". The word "conformed", unfortunately our word form means outward, doesn't it? In English, the word "form" tends to mean sort of "to look like". Right? We talk about form over function – as a metaphor for optics superseding substance - which is a shame because the Greek word here is *morphe*, from which we get our word "metamorphosis" – the process of transformation.

And what it's saying is God is going to cause metamorphosis in us. He is going to change our very inner essence into the very inner essence of Jesus Christ. What it means to be a Christian is you get passionately in love - not with just obeying the rules - but with *the character of Jesus*. You read about him in the Bible, and you're amazed by what you see. What do you see? You see truth and yet love. You see wisdom. You see scandalous approachability. You see utter conviction. You see incredible courage. You see a brightness, a radiance.

You say, "*That's* a human being...and more than a human being!" See? What are we being told here? We're being told the good that God is moving you toward - everything that happens in your life - externally good or externally bad...is for good. Everything that happens in your life, he says, if you love Him, is molding you, is sculpting you, is contouring you, is polishing you, is shaping you into the image of His Son.

God is going to make you like Jesus. He is going to give you that incredible greatness. He is going to give you that incredible compassion. He is going to give you that incredible sensitivity. He is going to give you that incredible courage. He is going to do that. Everything that's happening in your life is leading to that. Everything! It's predestined. What? It's fixed. It's guaranteed.

Do you know one of the most astounding things - even though I'm not quite to verse 30 yet - in verse 30 is this. It says the ones he foreknew, he predestined. (V.30) "*And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified...*" - We understand all that, but then it says, - "*...he also glorified.*" Wait a minute. Glorified is in the past tense. Shouldn't he say, "The ones he foreknew, he predestined, and he justified, and he *will* glorify"? No.

Why does he say glorified? That's one of the most astounding verses in the Bible, because it is so absolutely certain that God is going to make you as beautiful as Jesus, going to make you as great as Jesus. God is going to give you all these incredible things. It's an accomplished fact. And He can talk about it in the past tense because it's as good as done. You see? It's guaranteed.

God is going to make you as radiant, as holy, and as happy as Jesus. He is committed to that. He is not going to let *anything* in life get in between you and that. No matter what people have done to you and no matter what *you* have done. No matter how much you self-harm and no matter how much people have tried to harm you, God is not going to let any of that happen. He is not going to let any of that get you away from this.

You are predestined to be conformed to the image of God's Son. But not only that, (v.29b) "...that he might be the firstborn among many brothers." See, verse 29 is telling us that something is guaranteed and verse 30 is telling what it is. And it's not grad school, or happy marriage, or career advancement – it's something that circumstances have nothing to do with. If anything, even the worst circumstances only enhance it.

The first good thing we have in this verse is the fact that we are on a collision course with greatness. Nothing can hold us back. And everything God is doing in your life is moving you in that direction. He suffered not that we might not suffer, but that when we suffer, we'll become *like* him. "Father, forgive them." You see? All the character of Jesus.

But, the other thing is we become members of God's family. Jesus is the firstborn among many brothers. We are *all* sons of God. We *all* are adopted into the family. We are *all* brought in. You know, Paul uses this term, and he is talking about something that happened in the Roman world that's a little different than the way we use adoption. Because in the Roman world, most people who were adopted were adults. Did you know that?

See, usually adoption happened like this. When some wealthy man had no heir and didn't want his estate to be broken up when he died, he would adopt a male, and he would adopt an adult male, usually someone who worked for him, usually someone he trusted. He would adopt that male and make him his son.

And the minute that legal thing happened, suddenly the relationship was changed from formality to intimacy, from temporariness and conditionality to permanence and unconditionality. All the debts and all of the financial condition of that man before adoption were wiped out. And now he was rich. See, "conformed to the likeness of his Son" is something we have off in the future, *and* it's happening now, albeit it gradually.

Being firstborn among many brothers is something we have *now*. We are adopted, Paul says. This is astounding. The *minute* you become a Christian, you now have this intimacy of relationship. You have this unconditionality of relationship, and you are wealthy. Everything, in a sense, that Jesus Christ has accomplished now is transferred to you, and you are beautiful in him. You are rich in him spiritually in all these ways.

Now, ladies, be careful. Don't fall into the gender trap here. This is actually very subversive. See, on the surface it's easy to look at this and say, "Well of course an old patriarchal text would only mention *sons*, mentions *brothers*." You know, wouldn't it be better to say "sons and daughters"?

In fact, the latest NIV update translates this "First born of many brothers *and sisters*." But I'm intentionally not using that this morning. First of all, that's not what the Greek says. And listen, I have no problem with gender inclusive language when it's just correcting patriarchal exclusions in everyday syntax. But this is deeper than that.

You have to try to get out of your culture. You see, the Bible was written in a culture that more closely reflected modern Afghanistan than our modern Western world. You read that they just made it officially illegal for women to be educated. You see in all ancient cultures – and many traditional cultures still today – women were considered second class citizens.

In a traditional culture family with three daughters and one son, who is going to get the majority of the family resources? Come on, it's not going to be a four way split. Of course *he* would get more provisions. More inheritance. He would get more honor. "He is the son. You're just a girl." Some of you *come* from those traditional cultures – you know what I'm talking about.

But if you study Paul closely, you realize that Paul was living in a traditional culture. Saint Paul was living in a place where daughters were second-class. And so what does it mean when he says - to *every* Christian reading the letter of Romans - "We're all sons"? What is he saying? I'll tell you what he is saying.

What Paul is saying is revolutionary. He is saying every human being, when you love God, when you give yourself to Christ, when you become a Christian, there's no second class in God's family. None! You're all sons, you see. This is radical! This is Paul talking out of a traditional culture.

This humbles me because as a white male – the first born son at that! - I've never been excluded in that way, and as a result, I didn't see some of the sweetness of this welcome. Most of us didn't. It has taken the feminist theologians to show us this – another reason to be thankful for diversity in Christian scholarship. We need all the voices at the table.

So fellas, last sermon I told *you* not to be ashamed to be a little Mary. The mother of Jesus is *your* example too. Guys, we get to be brides of Christ. Ladies, you get to be adopted sons with full inheritance rights. Because when you become a Christian, this is yours. You are utterly welcome. You are raised to the highest honor. There is no second class.

Yes, Jesus is the eldest son, “the firstborn among many brothers” – but even that is subverted because again and again we are told that we are “in him”. That what’s his is ours. That’s what it means to be “in Christ.” It means we are loved like he is loved. We are honored like he is honored...every one of us, no matter what! Your circumstances not only can’t hurt that. Your bad circumstances will only help you understand the beauty of that. It will get you to live out of it.

And the more you live out of who you are in Christ, you become like him in actuality. Do you see that? Paul is not promising us better life circumstances. He is promising us a far better life. He is promising you a life of greatness. He is promising you a life of joy. He is promising you a life of humility. He is promising you a life of nobility. He is promising you a life that goes on forever. “In Christ.” He says...and here we get to the third point. Why can you be happy? Why can you be joyful no matter what? He says your bad things turn out for good. Your good things can never be lost.

And third principle; The best is yet to come. Verse 30, “glory”. Paul says, “Do you understand glory?” *If* you understand what is to come, you can handle anything here. Do you know what? What amazes me is even Ivan Karamazov knew that. During the pandemic I had some free time and I read “The Brothers Karamazov”. One of the greatest works of literature in human history. That’s not hyperbole.

There are three Karamazov brothers and Ivan is the bad one. He’s an atheist – he rejects the Christianity of his community - yet he understood something profound. It’s a rich portrayal of the complexities of faith. Of course he is a fictional character, but Dostoyevsky says this through him. He says, “I have a childlike conviction that the sufferings will be healed and smoothed over...and that ultimately, at the world’s finale, in the moment of eternal harmony, there will occur and be revealed something so precious that it will suffice for all hearts, to allay all indignation, to redeem all human villainy, all bloodshed; it will suffice not only to make forgiveness possible, but also to justify everything that has happened with men...”

Now, you see, there are certainly some people here I'm sure - and this is one of the things I love about SWFF - who are saying, "Do you know what? This has been extremely interesting and kind of eye opening, I must say. However, I'm not sure I'm a Christian. I'm not sure I believe all this stuff. At least I'm not sure I believe Jesus is the Son of God. I don't know if I can trust the Bible and all it says. So where does this leave me?"

Here's what I want to say. First of all, I certainly do not want to short-circuit the process it takes to become a Christian. Here's the process. And I'm paraphrasing C.S. Lewis. Don't come to Christianity because it's comforting. Don't come to Christianity because it's encouraging. Don't come to Christianity because it's relevant. Don't come to Christianity because it's exciting. Come to Christianity because it's *true*.

Because if it's not true, how could it be relevant or exciting or comforting? You see? And therefore, it would be ridiculous to say, "Well, I have all these intellectual doubts. I don't even know if this is true, but, gee, I would love to have all this kind of joy." That would be the *worst* thing in the world. In fact, the joy would never last.

Because the joy is *based* on what? Not on your circumstances but these convictions about Christ and about the gospel and these lofty and incredibly important truths. It's all based on that.

Paul says just a few verses earlier, **Romans 8:18 (KJV)** "*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.*" Reckon. Consider. He compares. He thinks it out. He adds it up. That's where all the happiness comes from. That's thinking. Thinking. It's not a feeling. Christianity is not a spirit to be caught. Christianity is not like that. Christianity is not like, "I feel bad, so I'll go out shopping. I feel bad, so I'll go to the top of a mountain. I'll breathe in the air."

You know, what you are doing at that point is, "Let me just get *away* from the hardness of life. Let me stop thinking." Christianity is always, not the *absence of thinking*, but the presence of *more thinking*. You don't deal with difficulties through ignorance, through not thinking, but rather by adding what? This whole perspective. Paul reckons. He thinks. He looks at all this, and he works it all out. He says all that.

Listen. I don't want to get rid of the rationale that you need to think about these things. You need to work it out. You have to decide, "Is Jesus who he said he is?" You need to recognize all this, *but* here's what I don't want you to believe. I don't want you to think this talk about glory and about heaven trivializes suffering. We're going to talk about Christian tears next week. But you'll hear this accusation about Christians. That faith is just the opiate of the masses. Keep them busy with happy thoughts of heaven so we can exploit them on earth.

Not a bit. I want to say what Ivan Karamazov said. This is the only worldview that takes your brokenness seriously. This is the reason why I have *not* told stories the way the motivational speakers do. "Oh, so and so died, killed by a drunk driver. So the parents led a change in public policy so drunk drivers are taken off the road. People's lives have been saved, so she didn't die in vain. Their daughter didn't die in vain."

That is not a consolation. I would not trade you my daughter for better public policy. I'm sorry, no way. Nothing is going to bring my daughter back. Public policy, saving lives....nothing but *this* will address that. Your souls are so great and your suffering is so deep, that nothing but this will overwhelm it. Glory does not trivialize human brokenness.

It's the only thing I think addresses it and takes it seriously. For goodness sake, what else could *possibly* deal with the hurts of our hearts? Nothing else! Your soul is too great for anything but this.

So reckon. Consider. By all means think through the implications. But don't sell yourself short on platitudes – either from non-believers or from Christians. Look at Jesus on the cross. See what he has done for you. Get it in your soul. Until you know that *your bad things turn out for good...your good things can never be lost...and the best things are yet to come.*

Let's pray...