

Ephesians
One Body of Christ
"Confidence, Suffering and Glory"
Ephesians 3:1-13

Please turn in your scriptures to Paul's letter to the Ephesians 3: 1-13. Paul continues to write to the church in Ephesus. And he says this.

For this reason, I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, on behalf of you Gentiles, assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you are the mystery was made known to me by revelation. As I have written briefly, when you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations, as it has now been revealed to his apostles, his holy apostles and prophets by the spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Now of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints. This grace was given to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone. What is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. So I ask you, I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

Now, I do want to take just a moment this morning before we dive into this passage for a little sidebar here. Now we are two chapters into the book of Ephesians, and I just want to point out, have you noticed the linear manner in which Paul writes? Have you noticed his logic, how he's building from the very beginning, even in his greeting, you know, grace and peace? Why? Why do I say that? I say grace and peace? Because you have been, what? From the for the foundations of the earth. And then he lays out step by step, you've been redeemed. You've been adopted, you've been made heirs, you've been given assurance. And then he moves on to say, and we know this because we are united with Christ, who reigns in heaven, and we are his body. But if we're his body here on earth, that means that we are his body - His dwelling place on earth were his temple. You can see how he's developing this argument in a very logical way. I just want to point out this is High Greek and Roman rhetorical style. I would even argue that he's even better than many of the rhetoricians of the classical world, because he's not just working out of a Roman Greek style, but rather he's coming from this foundation of the Judean

book of the law and teachings of Proverbs and disputation literature that he finds in the Old Testament. Do you know that even Caesar knew when they when they took over that region on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, even Caesar would have known about the Judeans and their literary history.

You know, one, none of the other colonies were like them, that they had this book of the law and this long redemptive history of multiple different writers. So Paul was working out of that wonderful, regardless of even if you don't believe it's Scripture, just this wonderful body of literature. But then he was using the best of Greek and Roman rhetoric in order to communicate it to his audience. I think of Paul's being almost like a lawyer, giving his summation argument at the end of a court case, and he's mustering all the evidence. He's disposing of the objections. It's brilliant. I remember having a friend who was a lawyer, and he was talking to me because I just find myself drawn to Paul as I hear him making his arguments. He kind of sounds like a lawyer. As a matter of fact, I think there's a reason why our tradition in the reformed tradition, which so much favors systematic theology and logic and technical terminology, how we're just drawn to Paul, we put a disproportionate amount of energies into reading Paul as opposed to the rest of Scripture.

Now, why am I saying all this? The point is this I want to point out that Paul is just one of many voices in the Bible. I mean, notice just even all the different genre? With Paul we have this, this rhetorical, epistolary we call it. But let's not ignore the fact that we also have whole books that are just dedicated to worship. Where you have the author writing things like, oh Lord, oh Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth? And it's just praise and worship. It's not it's not all logic. It's emotion. It's just response. Or we also have books that are like legal texts where somebody actually is laying out. So if this happens, then you need to do this. But if this happens after that and you do this instead, and this is what you do if you break the law, and with these legal texts laying out the revelation of God in the form of law, we have historical narratives we have to read between the lines. You're notice, you have to read between the lines. Try to figure out, is this a good thing or a bad thing? And you really make, you know, particular note when the narrator says something like in God was pleased when this happened, you go, okay, okay, so that's a good thing, but you don't always know. It's a matter of fact, it comes out in some of our stories where we talk about doing things like, you know, I'm going to lay out a fleece to see what the Lord's will is. And then we actually read Gideon, that Gideon story a little more closely. And like, it's actually not a great idea to lay out fleeces. That's not what you're supposed to do. That's an omen. Yes, the Lord honors it, but it's kind of showing out Gideon didn't have faith, and he should have had more faith in that. He'd already had an angel speaking to him after all. You have these stories. It's a different way of doing theology.

What's the point? The point is, this is that God has revealed himself in a variety of different race through different genre of literature, through different voices, people with different kinds of autobiographies. If Paul, who's deeply educated, but then you have some of the disciples who are deeply uneducated, you've got it. You've got a movement leader, and Moses, but then you've got other people like Jonah who just rather not do any of it, any of the stuff that they're called to do. You have you have people who are artists who are singing to the Lord glory, and then you have Curmudgeons like Amos says, I'm not a prophet. I mean the son of a prophet. What am I doing here? The one for the Lord who called me to it?

And we have a lot of different situations in life to we have Scripture that comes out of mourning and lament with Scripture, that comes out of times of scarcity and loss, with scriptures that are coming out of just times of exuberant worship in abundance. This all undergirds, and it should be an encouragement to us, because it shows us that God doesn't just reveal himself through one situation in life, one style of writing, one kind of personality, but rather in these many voices that communicate to us the one true divine voice. We find the beginnings of that doctrine that we call sola scriptura.

This is part of what it means for the sufficiency of Scripture to be true. It doesn't just mean that it says all of God's words that we need for any given topic, though, it does. But it also means this, that it says it through different voices and experiences and genre to speak to all of our situations in life.

Are you in mourning? There's Scripture for you. Are you in a time of celebration? There's Scripture for you. Are you? Are you a lawyer or an engineer? We've got great logical thinkers in there. Are you someone who's more given to hearing stories? You like to see how the ideas developed, how the people developed. We've got stories to see.

Scripture is rich, rich, and it gets to the core of every human experience. To paraphrase one ancient saint, the Word of God is a puddle that a young child can splash in, but it's also an ocean that a grown adult can drowned. See, God's word is truly rich, and it is truly sufficient. We actually see Paul's logic on display here.

Did you even notice what is this first line? After having written chapters one and two of Ephesians? Look what he says here at the very beginning of chapter three. For this reason, everything I've just told you is now for the reason that you'll understand what I'm going to say next. Now look at the last line of this passage that we're about to read.

What does he say? So, okay, so what is he doing there? He's telling us now what I just told you. Developing on chapters one and two. For this reason, I'm telling you. So what? So you will know not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory. As verse 13 says. so, before we even dive into the verse, we should just recognize this is what it's about. He's

explaining to them why they ought not despair, even though they're hearing stories of his suffering.

You know, Paul talks a lot about his suffering as an apostle. This is something that he unpacks quite a bit. He doesn't in first Corinthians four, as we'll read in a minute in Second Corinthians 11, he does it later in Galatians six, and he has this eye view, this view of suffering. The suffering is something that it's just a natural outworking of his apostolic ministry. But look what he says in first Corinthians four, chapter four, verse nine. He says, for I think, I think I look how Paul talks. His view is he's thinking he's walking us through it. For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, we're the last order of people like men sentenced to death because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men.

Notice that for Paul, his suffering as an apostle is not just something that kind of happens sometimes as a result of his ministry, but this is actually central to his ministry. He even likens it or connects it to Christ suffering. That's what he says. Look, he says in Colossians 1:24, he says this. *Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body. That is the church.* Who is saying, there, Paul saying, I is. It is as an apostle who is sent out by Jesus Christ, the risen Lord himself, to go in and finish the mission that he had been called to, which is to fill the earth with his gospel message, with redeemed images of God, so that they can now reflect God's glory back to him in heaven. I have been sent out in this way. Recognize that one of my functions is to suffer so as to fill out the sufferings of Christ. Now, that doesn't mean that somehow the death on the cross was not complete in its work. It doesn't mean that when Christ says it is finished, he's wrong or anything like that, that that work is complete and total. And yet notice what Paul is saying. He's saying now that we are in the body of Christ, now that we recognize that the we are united with Christ through the spirit, we are now his body on earth. When we suffer, for we are, as it were, filling out the sufferings of Christ.

Paul had been beaten, he'd been stoned, he'd been imprisoned. Not to mention the social censure that he would have endured as a result of his conversion to Christianity. But he tells us when these things happen, it is the church filling out, being united with, participating with. These are all the terms that theologians use participating in the sufferings of Christ. It's a remarkable, remarkable idea. And it's not just for apostles, it's for the whole church. So in this passage that we're reading today, Paul is saying, I am suffering and you're seeing my suffering, but I don't want you to despair. And so he shows them why they ought not to despair. Again. He's working out his argument very logically.

He's working from one point to the next. So he gives them really three main reasons. I swear I'm not someone who just does three points for every sermon. But this is how Paul thinks. Okay,

this is why I think most PCA sermons or three point sermons we preach Like Paul, he talks in three pointers. And here's his three points today.

He's talking about the fact that he has confidence so that he because he knows that his suffering is unto glory. Okay. He has confidence because he knows that his suffering is unto glory or in the way that he argues it. Here he goes because I understand the authority of God's Word. I have confidence. Therefore I can deal with the suffering that comes because of the audacity of the mission of Jesus Christ. So the authority of the word undergirds me as I pursue the audacity of the mission, so that I might articulate an authentic faith, the authority of the word, the audacity of the mission, and the authenticity of faith.

All right, so let's look at the first one, the authority of the word in verses one through six. Do you notice in this passage how often Paul says the gift of grace? You know, he just keeps saying and he keeps saying it was a gift of grace was because of grace by grace, the gift of grace was gifted to me. She knows how. He keeps saying, I notice the central city of grace as a gift for Paul. Now, this is very central to his theology because he doesn't believe that grace is just about the forgiveness of sins. I think that's often how we talk about it. We say, I, I receive God's unmerited favor. That's what grace is, and that's true. But then we usually go on to just talk about this unmerited favor being the forgiveness for sins that we are justified or were declared righteous where we were once unrighteous because of our faith. Now that is true. That is all the gift of grace. That is all the working out of grace. But if we stop there, then, according to Paul, we've got too small of a vision of what grace is doing. Notice what he says. He says, for us to have the Word of God, that's a grace to so the first, even to hear how we might be saved. That's a grace of God for us to have the spirit illuminate it. So I can properly understand that as God's Word. That's a grace of God to be changed by it. In regenerate and effectual calling, as we call it in theology, that is a grace of God to then have, you know, be justified, to be adopted, to be declared as a saint, to be formed and conformed to Christ over the course of my life, to be glorified with him in the heavenlies. All of that is a gift of grace. In other words, Paul says, me being an apostle, it's just a gift. It's a gift of grace. It's not my authority. It's not something that I've done. It's not because I studied at the feet of Gamaliel. It's not. It's not because I was very thoughtful about the teaching of the Word of God. That's not how I gained my apostleship. As a matter of fact, if you take who I am, who I bring to the equation, not only should I not be an apostle, my very character, my very autobiography, puts me in opposition to the gospel. That's what he says later on in this passage, in verse eight, he says, I am the very least of the saints, the very least of them. He says this even more strongly in First Timothy chapter one. He says, I'm the chief of sinners. I'm the foremost of sinners. Now we might think, well, Paul, you're being kind of been kind of hard on yourself there, aren't you? I mean, are you just being humble? I mean, that's how we sometimes talk, right? I'm the last one who should be considered, you know, some, follower of God or some. I was dragged kicking and screaming into the gospel. You.

We say things like that. But I want to point out, Paul, did not see that as kind of a false humility. He actually believed that he was the chief of sinners alive in the world, in the church in that day, he was the last person who should be counted as an apostle. He says it in first Timothy one. He unpacks it by saying, I was a blasphemer, I was a persecutor, and I was an insolent opponent of the church, as he saw himself as uniquely unsuited for the work of being an apostle. It even seemed to be something that dogged him. I sometimes wonder if this has to do with the thorn in his flesh. He had this memory in his flesh right? He saw the faces of the men and women, the brothers and sisters now in the faith as they were killed, as their lives were taken from them, as they were beaten, as they were thrown in jail and separated from their families. He had this living memory within him, and it was a hard memory that dogged him his entire life. It seems that in his fleshly memory, he could remember brazenly attacking them with hatred and malice and unbelief. And now he was an apostle to the church.

You see, for Paul to say that his apostleship is a gift, not something he deserves. He is speaking a hard truth. I want to point out, He's not being euphemistic about the term gift, because sometimes use the term gifts as sort of a euphemism for not a gift for something you earned right? Anyone remember back in the old days when if you were particularly smart in school, they put you in the gifted and talented program? And when remember that and get classes. I remember walking by their always nicer classrooms in our classrooms. I say that I'm not bitter at all, even though I was never counted in their number. But when we said gifted, we weren't saying, you know, who knows where they got it? They're just given to them as a gift. They should be totally humble as a result. No, they totally thought they were better than the rest of us. Paul's not using gifted and talented in that way. He said, no, this really is a gift. I have nothing. I make a grave error. If I think it's because of me that you should listen to one word that I say.

I'm reminded another of another story about the great baseball player Joe DiMaggio Joltin Joe the Yankee Clipper, for the longest hitting streak in baseball history, a record that still stands at last at 56 games of safe hitting from May 15th to July 17th, 1941. He was an icon, not just of American baseball. He was an icon of American culture. He seemed to embody American greatness in many ways. He actually went off to war. That's how great he was. He went off and served in the Air Force during World War Two, only released from that service in 1945 because of ulcers that he had, he was sent back home.

Now there's a story about after he got back home, he was in New York and he went to a Yankees game. He wasn't playing. He was just going to sit in the stands and to attend to the game. And he brought his son, Joe Junior, with him when I was about probably 5 or 6 years old, and they just slipped quietly into the stadium and they found a seat and they sat down. But as you can imagine, slowly people started to realize it's Joe DiMaggio. He's here. He's back with us. And

there's a murmur that went around the crowd until finally the whole stadium was saying in unison, Joe, Joe, Joe DiMaggio, Joe, Joe, Joe DiMaggio. And the way he tells the story is that his young son looked up to him and said, dad, they all know my name.

You see, the Apostle Paul knew that it was a mistake to take credit for the glory that was not his glory at all, to take credit for the authority that was not his authority at all. For him to say, listen how they listen to my words. He goes, no, no, these words were given to me. Notice what he says there in verses four and five. He says, when you read this, you perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ which was not made. No, no, no. So already this is being active. It was not made known to the sons of men and other generations, as it has been now revealed, some because he studied it, now because he discovered it, and he's not alone in having it, but it's been revealed to God's holy apostles and prophets by whom the spirit. You see, Paul recognizes that it was not his authority or his insight that he brought to the Ephesians, but it was an authority and insight, wholly owned and wholly offered by the God of grace.

This is true of an apostle. How much truer is it of us? We should be careful not to mistake our own glory and our own gifts of communications, and our own skills of persuasion for the power of God's Word alone. We should remember that when we're evangelizing our neighbors, when we're talking to others and sharing with them the gospel, we should remember the fact that it is not about our ability to do sales, but it's about God's work, his spirit being at work in us as we just proclaim the truths that have been given to us. As Paul says, the things with which we have been entrusted. I can tell you, tell you, as a minister of the gospel, I have seen this worked out so many times in my life that someone will come back after years or months or weeks, and they'll say something like, you know what you said that day just really changed my heart. What you said that day really, really, really helped me see clearly what was going on. And oftentimes when they say that, I go, I don't even remember saying it, but the Lord was at work in a way that my skills at persuasion were not.

You see, when we sit down and evangelize and don't get me wrong, we do well to steward the gift that we've been given. Well, we do well to say it clearly and articulate the truth of the gospel clearly. But we need to never forget that the power of the gospel is not in our ability to present it, but it is in the word itself. Can you imagine how we would evangelize if we believed this for real? We recognized that this was not about my ability to say it the right way, but rather it is me giving an opportunity to my neighbor and to the world that is desperate for hope. I'm giving them an opportunity to hear the Word of God that he has revealed to the cosmos. It's not in me. It's his authority that's convincing. It's his power that changes hearts.

If it was up to us, our mission would fail. But it is the power of God to save. And if this is true, then we have a great reason for confidence. Which brings us to the next section.

Because Paul knows he needs to have a great confidence because he is called to an audacious mission. Look at verses seven through ten where Paul talks about the mission that he's been called to. It is indeed audacious. To me, though, I am the very least of all the saints. As we just discussed, this grace was given to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

We will come back later in this series to talk about what he means by rulers and authorities in heavenly places, because that ought to give us pause. And he's saying a very specific thing. But I just want to point out Paul knew that his mission was grand, and it was audacious. And it was not just a Gentiles. It was to the Jews, and it was to the rest of the world. Even the heavenly beings. You see, Paul knew the cost of this audacious mission that he had been called to pursue. We've already said he'd been beaten, even stoned, and left for dead outside the city walls. He'd been imprisoned, he'd been interrogated. He'd been rejected by his countrymen and his colleagues just because of the faith that he knew to be true. So he understood what it meant to follow that great commission that Jesus had commissioned all of us with, to proclaim the gospel and to baptize and disciple the nations. And he recognized that that commissioning brought with its suffering. A commission brings with it suffering.

Now we have to be clear, there are many religions in the world that offer a different kind of hope. They offer some kind of present gift of life and success and benefit. They just follow the religious instructions of the prophet and you'll live a harmonious life. You'll succeed. You'll have something to show for it. Everyone around you will see that you are following the right faith. You are the one who's following the way. And I just want to point out that is alien to the teaching of scripture. It's even sad that in many Christian circles around the world today, you see this kind of teaching. If you just follow Jesus and he'll bless you financially or he'll bless you in your relationships, or he'll bless you and your business dealings. And I just want to point out that is a heresy of the scriptures. As a matter of fact, it's interesting to notice that the worst heresies and unbelief that spring out of Christian history emerge from periods when the Christian community is enjoying a momentary comfort or wealth.

You know, Martin Luther saw this when he went to Rome, and he saw the indulgence and the wealth and the corruption of the clergy there. And now, he said, I know I can understand where all of this false teaching is coming from.

It's important for us to remember theological progressivism, theological liberalism. It does not come out of impoverished churches who are being persecuted for the faith, but rather it comes out of the well-funded and sophisticated universities and seminaries of Europe and the United

States. You see, it comes out of churches where the gospel has now become optional, so we can start to play with it and mess around, not take it so seriously.

You see, when life really is a matter of life and death and the gospel, truth matters and you find people adhering closely to it. You see, suffering is at the heart of our gospel. It's at the heart and the core of our message. It lies at the center of our gospel message, where we see Christ Jesus, who is the perfect embodiment of the good, the true and the beautiful, very God and very man, alone and isolated on a Roman cross, dying the death of a criminal, even though he does not deserve it. It is the truest place where we find the suffering of the innocents, where we find the suffering of an injustice happening in human history. It is the greatest injustice ever done in human history. And there it is, right at the core, at the center of our gospel message, Jesus Christ of Nazareth sang the first psalm that comes to his mind, which is Psalm 22.

And he says, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

That same prophet, priest and king is the one who has given Paul his marching orders. And Paul knows it. And that's why Paul knows that he can't say, Jesus, you don't understand what I'm going through right now. You don't understand the persecution and how I fell from a position of authority and reputation, and now I'm being treated like a common criminal. Jesus, you don't understand because Paul knows that Jesus knows. Paul knows what the author of Hebrews would say when he's talking about the high priest. You remember, the high priest job is to go out amongst the people and then to come back into the temple, even into the Holy of Holies, and bring intercession on behalf of the people before the Lord. And the author of Hebrews and chapter 4:15 says, we have a better high priest, Jesus Christ. He's better in a whole variety of ways. One of them that is in the order of Melchizedek, which means he predates, supersedes, and post dates all of the priests that we see in the Old Testament. But not only that, we have a high priest, and this is what he says.

Chapter 4:15 he says, for we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted or tried. Okay, that's the same word in the Greek. Tempted or tried as we are, and yet without sin.

You see, God does know of our suffering, and he tells us to bring it to him. That's why we have psalms like Psalm 88, for instance, Psalms where it's a lament, it's a gentleman, Heman the Israelite, and he's, he's going through this lament of suffering that he's gone through. But if you notice what's interesting about Psalm 88, I know some of you have read it before is that there's no turn at the end. There's you usually with laments, you have a kind of redemptive turn. There's a salvific turn where he goes, but you lifted me up out of the miry pit. You lifted me up out of the clay. You set me on firm ground. You put a new song in my mouth. You get that kind of redemptive turn. But if you notice, Psalm 88 never goes there. It just ends in the lament.

Some people say, why is this in the scripture? Why, why, why have a Psalm that's just all lamenting and mourning and grief? And I think it's for the reason that we've all experienced in our lives from time to time, there is suffering that you will experience that will not be nicely wrapped up in a bow. You won't be able to say at the end of it in this life, oh, now I know why that happened. Because, look, the Lord was doing a greater thing. As a teacher in seminaries to always warn our students, don't only tell stories that end well, because that's not how our suffering is in life, is it? Often times in this life, we don't get to see how it ends well. And the Lord says, I've got Psalms for that. I receive those prayers. You don't have to come with some kind of Pollyanna forced smile to act as if it's all okay. I know it's not. I've been there.

But suffering can bring a myriad of temptations. Despair and hopelessness is one of them. But another one, perhaps the most insidious, is the temptation for nostalgia. Because present suffering is harder than past suffering. Past suffering. We can least say no matter how bad it was, I can look back and say, I know how I'm going to get through this. I know the way forward. I know what happens next, right? But present suffering, we don't have that. We don't know where it's going. So we have this added uncertainty, which creates a deep disquiet within us. But Paul says Scripture says be careful. Be careful about being nostalgic about the past. Be careful about creating in your mind some kind of golden age where you gloss over how bad it actually was because you say, no, no, it was better. And if we can just get back to that old time, if I can just get out of this present suffering and get back to that old time, then things will be better. But I think we all know, if we're honest with ourselves, and if we see and learn from the teaching of Scripture, we know that there is no golden age to get back to. It's not John Calvin's Geneva where this majority percentage of his graduates for a period of years were martyred within the first year or two of their graduation by the very people they were sent to spread the gospel with. Where there are stories of wives of his seminary graduates banging on his door late at night with their bedclothes covered in blood because their husband was murdered right next to them in their bed, and they ran through the night to return to Geneva. You can't say that John Knox of Scotland. Presbyterians, we can't say that that was our golden age. Go back and read again about the persecution. But the rejection from the church itself and the British Isles during that period of time. We can't say it's postwar America.

I'm reminded of a song that was written about 23 years after Joe DiMaggio tried to slip into that stadium with the New York Yankees. This is in the middle of the Cultural Revolution and institutional breakdown of the 1960s. And Paul Simon, Art Garfunkel wrote a song about longing for the nostalgia of America's former glory. And you all know it. I know. They write in this song, "Where have you gone, Joe DiMaggio? Our nation turns its lonely eyes to you. Woo woo woo. What's that you say, Mrs. Robinson? Mrs. Robinson is the voice of the disaffected, cynical older generation who saw the Golden Age pass away. What do you say, Mrs. Robinson. Joltin Joe has left and gone away. Hey, hey. So Simon and Garfunkel also knew that you can't return back to

the golden age, to the icons of your youth. You can't return back because it never was as great as you remembered it was

. But it's not only that for Christians, brothers and sisters, you need to know that the gospel is not for that past day. The gospel is for the day that the Lord has put you in the Gospels for your day. It's for the people you know. And you love is for the places where you work and you play. So the context in which you are living today, listen, we cannot even let me let me put a fine point on this. We ought not even long for the day when Jesus Christ and His resurrected body walked the earth. There were those who did that back then, and you know how he responded to them. He said, don't cling to me. I have much greater work to do in the future. When Mary is in the garden and Jesus says her name and she hears them, she finally recognizes, here he is. She says, Rabbani. She cries out to him, and what does he say? Don't cling to me. I still got to go to the father. Understand the spirit, then wait until you see what happens next.

See, we don't find refuge in nostalgia. We don't long for an earlier day, but we remember that God's powerful overcoming of suffering in the past is also powerful. To overcome suffering now in the present. And that's part of the Gospels audacity that even though human history continues, even though cultures change, even though the languages change, even though we are all gathered here, people who Peter and Paul could not have possibly imagined worshiping the Yahweh of the Old Testament. What amazing thing that is. Even though history comes and goes and ebbs and flows, God's Word remains the same. And our mission is to declare it clearly and audaciously in the world around us.

So that leads us to the third point. In brief, the authenticity of faith. Because of his confidence in the authority of God's Word, he can now persist in the suffering that comes as a result of the audacity of the mission. As a result, Paul can be honest about his faith. He can be sincere in it. He is confident, and that confidence strengthens him in times of suffering because he understands it. All of it. All of this work is directed toward the glory of God. Our faith is future looking. As the author of Hebrews puts it in Hebrews chapter 11, verse one, what does he say your faith is this. It's not because of the stuff around you is reflecting what you believe. Is it assurance for things that are hoped for? Right? Is an evidence of things unseen, not perceived with your human perception, right? It's evidence of things not seen. And that is what faith is. Faith recognizes that even though there is suffering in this world that isn't even comparable to the glory that is to come.

As we said, there's a unique pain and present suffering because it's got that added element of uncertainty to its why past suffering seems manageable, but present suffering seems unbearable. But what Paul is saying is this is that you can put your hope in this and not be paralyzed by the pain. You can put your hope in this, that there will come a time when even the

worst wounding that you feel now you will understand and see how it is directed towards God's glory.

Now let me be careful. I'm not saying this in some kind of simplistic way. Let's go back again to the worst offense that we can imagine ever happening in human history Jesus Christ, the very Son of God, the Creator of the universe, the source of all life and all authority is placed, takes his position, offering himself up because of who he is. He offers himself up, but is taken by his creation, treated as a criminal, spit upon, mocked and abused before dying in the most dehumanizing way that the people of his day could imagine. This is the greatest injustice on earth. How could that possibly be turned to good? When we see him in his resurrected body? We may even want to say Jesus, of course the holes are gone from your body, right? Because all that was bad before has been washed away. Now that you have this imperishable body. But what do we notice? He still has the holes in his hands. He still has the marks in his side. But the thing that used to mark the greatest injustice and sorrow and was a cause of grief, has now become a cause of celebration because it shows us his glory as our Redeemer.

I am convinced of this. Let me be honest. I have no idea what it's going to be like to have bodies that are not weighed down by sin, that are not inching forward towards death, that are somehow going to live forever. I have no idea what that's going to be like, but I do believe this. Our memories will not be wiped in the new heavens and new earth. The causes of suffering today will become the tales that we tell of God's faithfulness, of his glory, of his presence, of his redemption. Just like those nail holes and Christ's arms and the spear hole in his side show us to what lengths he would go to save us.

I think that's why Paul calls us to a life of authentic faith, is not shy away from the difficulties and the afflictions of this current life does not seek to hide in nostalgia of the past or sentimentality, but rather is firmly fixed in the glory of God to come look at what he says there in Romans 8:18. I've already kind of said it now in this sermon. What does he say? ***I am convinced of this, that the current sufferings are not even comparable to the glory that is to come.*** Can you imagine a day when the wounds of this present life become the tales that we tell in worship, as we gather around to remember what the King did on our behalf?

That is your hope Christians: be confident in the authenticity of the Word of God, which in turn bolsters you and the suffering that comes to this audacious ministry and mission to which we've been called and leaves us in a place of authentic faith, that we can be honest about who we are and about our experiences because we know the glory that awaits.

Let's pray.

Heavenly father, we do lift up this reflection to you, Lord, we know how unable we are to accomplish the work that you have called us to. And in many ways, that is the essence of the

law versus the gospel. We have been called to a thing that is too great for us. But here is the gospel of Christ as accomplished it is in us. He is accomplishing it in it. He is accomplishing it in us, and he will accomplish it in us in the future. Lord, we come before you and we pray that you would strengthen us for the mission, basing us firmly on the authority of your word that we might have a deep and authentic faith. In Christ's name we pray.

Amen.