

Heirs of God!

Romans 8.17

Few of us have had the experience of hearing the reading of a will. Few of us have wealthy relatives or friends, and sitting on hearing their last testament read to see if there has been something left you is rare.

But for every child of God, the will of God in our eldest brother Jesus, who died for us and rose again – is found in the Bible. Jesus is, as Romans 10 says, the Lord who is rich toward those who call upon him.

We come to the crown jewel of adoption in Romans 8 – “if children, children of God, testified to by our spirits and the Holy Spirit of adoption – then Heirs, Heirs of God, and Joint-Heirs with Christ!

All that is the Father’s is yours; all that is Christ’s is yours; God is himself your all in all; and all things are yours! The greatest of all riches are wrapped up in the title and status, as sons and daughters of God!

Not only is God and Christ your your portion, your inheritance, but you are his! You are Christ’s and Christ is God’s!

No wonder that it takes the Spirit Himself to convince us of this incredible reality! That mere creatures of dust, creatures of yesterday, would be welcomed to heaven – much less to the very table of God as his own offspring? Not all the angels in heaven could accomplish that! And praise God, not all the devils of hell can rob you of that!

But at the same time, while all believers are his children right now, and heirs of God – it does not presently appear what we shall be. You have not entered into the fullness of that privilege to which right now you are entitled!

In fact the trials, sufferings, temptations, and opposition from the world, your own flesh and the devil – all seem to indicate that we are a pretty sad flock of sheep, set for slaughter! We look more forsaken by God at times than favorites!

But notice here the end of the verse. If we suffer, we suffer with Christ and not alone, not pointlessly. If we suffer with Christ, we must, because of Christ, be glorified – glorified with him!

This is where Paul will launch forth regarding the whole creation groaning and awaiting the release and redemption of the whole earth with God's children.

So, we begin with...

All Children of God are Heirs of God –

Now, first, what is an heir?

Everybody is an heir of something, of someone. This does not apply to angels who do not procreate but who are all the same age. Though they are called sons, they are not like us under a headship like us. All mankind are heirs of Adam. And as fallen, it is an awful inheritance we receive from our father – an awful name, a terrible debt of sin and a miserable estate.

But the fall of man is not the main story. The Bible is not about Adam the son of God in the garden at creation, but Jesus, THE Son of God, before Creation, who is the true heir of a new heavens and a new earth. Being an heir is not too remarkable. Being an heir of God is! There is no higher status than a child of God as we have seen.

So as children must be heirs – whoever your father is tells you what your inheritance is. Birthright confers a title to the father's property, distinct from any work or industry.

What is involved in this stupendous description of God's children?

What is the Children's Portion?

Peter says your inheritance is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you... a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1Pe 1:4-5); Paul writes of the hope of eternal life (Titus 3.7), the riches of the glory of God's inheritance in the saints (Eph. 1.18); a kingdom, says James (2.5), the kingdom prepared before the foundation of the world writes Matthew (25:34); the kingdom of God - 1 Corinthians 15.50; inherit the earth - Matt. 5.5; heirs of salvation - Heb. 1.14. The last book of the Bible says: "He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son," (Rev 21:7) and "a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away" (Rev 21:1 "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." ⁵ And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." (Rev 21:4-5)

Now as great as all these things are – and they are! – there is more besides. For Paul, it is not so much ownership that comes to the top but relationship. He tends toward God being your portion, like the Levites in the OT, who had no land inheritance. All Christians are Levites – a kingdom of priests – in the Lord! Ps. 73.25-26 says: “Whom have I in heaven *but You*? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

So to summarize: “Saints are heirs of the promise, heirs of righteousness, heirs of salvation, heirs of the grace of life, heirs of the kingdom, heirs of the world, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ. They inherit the earth, inherit the promises, inherit all things.” So said John Brown of Haddington

All of this is clearly of grace – God gives himself entirely freely. Inheritance is not of the law, (Rom. 4.14, Gal. 3.18); but by promise (Gal. 3.29, Heb. 6.17); by and according to the Word of grace. (Acts 20:32)

What does it mean to be living upon this pension? It means that God your portion is all-sufficient; his all-sufficiency of love comforts you; all-sufficiency of strength upholds you; all-sufficiency of power protects you; all-sufficiency of good satisfies you; all-sufficiency of wisdom guides and keeps you; all-sufficiency of glory rewards you; and all-sufficiency of blessing makes you happy. (Octavius Winslow)

Now right next to this, and on level with being an heir of God, is our next point: co-heirs with Jesus. This indeed is the centerpiece of the verse.

All Heirs of God are so by the co-heir and rightful heir, Jesus Christ.

What does this mean?

First thing to be said: **Jesus is the heir**

Jesus is the natural son, the proper heir; all believers are heirs by virtue of union with and in him. FF Bruce says: “The glory they inherit by grace is his by right.” Jesus is the heir in the parable in Mt. 21; Abraham was promised to be the heir of the world - Rom. 4.13; But that is in his seed, which is Christ.

You share in what is his, all of grace! Recall what he said as he rises from the dead and approaches his glorification? I go to MY God and your God; MY Father and your Father. You enter into his joy, the joy of the Lord, prepared for you before the world was made – Mt. 25.21. He has saved you that you may sit in his throne, to rule and enjoy all with and in him, Rev. 3.21. He has seated you that you may eat and drink at his table in His kingdom, Luke 22.30.

Jesus does not have two kingdoms – one for himself and one he shares with you. In this he is better than Joseph who ate at a separate table from his brothers. Jesus shares his one kingdom fully with you.

So what a great assurance; no greater security! He is your forerunner who enters first to attain his own, all this glory, all this inheritance – for you. He is the heir and has already secured this! Charles Hodge asks: “how could it be more secure that you are not only adopted, but adopted with the One who is heir by right?”

So, no inheritance from God apart from being co-heirs with Jesus!

But there is more here: Jesus' glory, like his atonement, is incomplete without the glorification of those for whom he died and for whom he is returning. Jesus' death purchased not only pardon for each and every one of those for whom he died; but purchased the title and right of heaven for them!

We ask the question – is it possible that any for whom Christ died, efficiently, can be lost? NO! Impossible! Their sins are all paid for!

Then, is it possible that any for whom Christ purchased the title and right of heaven, and has written their names there, will fail of their inheritance? Again, NO! There are no empty seats in heaven! There are no spare robes and crowns sitting unused in the corner of heaven gathering dust! There are no empty mansions, with a vacancy sign out front.

Oh, stand amazed that such security is for creatures like us! We had no hold on him at all. You were inheritors of the wind, empty creatures, vain and lost; we were his little tiny enemies.

Oh but what love has been bestowed on us that we should be called the children of God! 1 John 3.1-2.

But this raises the question – if Christians are heaven's favorites, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus – then why do they suffer so? It is so unexpected that those who are the very children of the God of the universe do not presently call this world their own!

Well, some in fact downplay suffering. But we should not. For as our final point – **All sharers of Christ's glory are sharers in Christ's sufferings**

How does this work? How do we understand this in the Christian life?

The nature and place of suffering here –

“If we suffer” is not introducing a doubt as to whether we will suffer. No, this is an assertion, a fact of your salvation. To follow Christ always involves taking up your cross.

With him as your life, as your Lord, and all good things with him, also comes suffering and tribulation! We must through much tribulation enter the kingdom. Jesus says you will enjoy in this life more than is taken away, houses, relationships, and so forth. But there will be tribulation.

Suffering is a many-sided thing. It can be great in either quantity or quality. It is part of resisting the old world and its ways; putting to death the old flesh which is crucified and yet continues to battle us; fighting the old master, the devil, with all the armor of God. The devil is bound in your life, no longer your king, but he still wants your vote! The world loves its own but not you unless you live worldly. The flesh would not fight if it were still dead and dormant without Christ. And Satan would not bother you if you still slept in his arms.

Suffering does three things of importance: 1. Suffering marks you. You are being like your Savior. 2. Suffering purifies. God uses this as part of his fatherly chastening. 3. Suffering trains you. It produces endurance through the power of grace. See how this gives assurance of faith, encouragement to the church, and witnesses to a fallen world that needs the gospel.

So see here, **What suffering is and is not:**

Suffering is WITH Christ, not in isolation from him. Christ is persecuted in us, and we are persecuted in Christ.

Suffering in and of itself is not redemptive, is not purifying. Christian suffering is not done so as to satisfy the demands of justice, but to prepare us for glory. It is a refining work.

OUR SUFFERINGS ARE NEVER NEVER NEVER put next to the sufferings of Jesus. They contribute nothing to the cost of salvation. Why? because that has been paid in FULL! But our sufferings in a different sense, are a necessary part of the our salvation. They are part of the refining process and sanctification, but not part of justification or keeping you saved. It is “because you are sons...”, not to make you or keep you sons!

Just like good works in and of themselves cannot be counted worthy apart from Jesus, so is it with suffering. Suffering with Christ, bearing your cross, is a part of living in Jesus – you *obey* in Christ, *walk in faith* and are *faithful* in Christ, *endure* in Christ; and we might say suffering is the crown of obedience.

Christians cannot avoid identification with Christ in a hostile world! And with that must come opposition.

One last item – **the connection between present suffering and future glory:**

We will come back to this next time, but this is a frequent connection in the Bible.

By Peter – after that equally tremendous description of our inheritance, he says: ⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for

a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, ⁷ so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

And Paul has this excellent saying to the Corinthians:

¹⁷ For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ² For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, (2Co 4:17-5:2)

What is the connection?

We must begin by saying that suffering is not the **cause** of glory; how can it be? The two are not worthy to be compared!

Just like our works, our religion, our piety, cannot be put next to Christ's, so our sufferings are rewarded exceeding abundantly all that we undergo! Octavius Winslow says, "One second of glory will extinguish a lifetime of suffering"!

Yet, they work for us a far more exceeding weight of glory. How? How can it be both? Not worthy to mention AND produces great glory? The answer: Magic?! NO! Grace!!!!

The sufferings of Jesus are stand alones – as they are vicarious, for us, they are redemptive. But they are also the pattern and example for his church.

Your sufferings mark you out as a believer, and a testimony to the world that there is something worth suffering for, living for, even dying for!

And to be co-heirs and co-suffering with Jesus elevates our appreciation for the church. Those who suffer are our brothers and sisters.

Of course, the secret to all this is keeping your eyes open. Aren't we surprised by suffering? We are so blessed in this country! And so when we have it so easy, every disturbance is hard to us.

But if by faith we look steadfastly to Jesus, who calls us to suffer, we will be readied to stand tall against the strong winds of life.

Let us ask ourselves in the words of the hymn-writer Isaac Watts:

*Am I a soldier of the cross,
A follower of the Lamb?
And shall I fear to own His cause
Or blush to speak His name?*

*Must I be carried to the skies
On flowery beds of ease?
While others fought to win the prize,
And sailed through bloody seas?*

*Are there no foes for me to face?
Must I not stem the flood?
Is this vile world a friend to grace,
To help me on to God?*

*Sure I must fight, if I would reign
Increase my courage, Lord!*

*I'll bear the toil, endure the pain,
Supported by Thy word.*

*Thy saints, in all this glorious war,
Shall conquer, though they die;
They view the triumph from afar,
And seize it with their eye.*

It will cost you something to be a Christian; it cost Jesus everything and you can never add or subtract to his finished work.

It will still cost you something to be a Christian; it will cost you more not be so!