

I don't recommend two year engagements. Anyone who gets engaged quickly realizes it's too long no matter how long. Two years is a long time. A long time to plan, change, think about the plans, and you guessed it change again. Bridal catalogs and wedding shows all work against a long engagement. The decisions and all the planning seem to take forever.

My wife and I longed for it to be over. Being engaged was nice, but we wanted to be married. We longed for a future. Much like an expecting mom longs for her child to be born. After an interview a job applicant longs to hear if they got the job. Or how fans of a team long for a future championship. It's not just about waiting or looking forward to the future. This is about longing for it. Waiting but wanting the future to come faster, not wanting to wait another second. That's longing.

It's like you and me longing for heaven. Oh how the Christian longs for heaven. That's what Paul addresses in the second lesson. It also serves as our Word of Romans this morning, longing. The Christian has some wonderful things to look forward to yet we wait just a little longer. Paul tells us...

**Long for the future
Balance sufferings with glory
Patiently endure**

I won't ask you to do it, but I want you to picture all of you sitting on this side of the sanctuary. Forget what you'd feel like all tightly packed in. What would a person coming late think about that scene? Would they go and sit over here, where no one was sitting? Of course not. They'd wonder what was happening, but they would almost certainly conform and sit with the group. It's all they'd be able to see. It's all you'd be able to see and concentrate on too.

Now change the picture slightly. Instead of you being packed into a little space over here I want you to think of all your sufferings being piled up over here. Picture every sorrow, sadness, and suffering you've had in your entire life heaped up into a big pile in this section. The little ones like colds and bad grades from when you were young might take a while to remember. Some suffering would come easier to mind like job losses and vacation disasters. Still others would have hardly a need to recall them specifically. The rocky marriage. The excruciating pain in the back, knees, or headaches you feel every day. The pain no doctor or medication helps. The depression dragging you down making it almost impossible to get out of bed. Each and every one goes on the pile. Our piles would get huge. Full of disappointments and troubles, every suffering ever experienced. Much due to our own poor decisions too. Throw those on. Sins we committed which led to suffering, and don't forget other people's sins against you which hurt and caused suffering. It's quite a pile. It's all your present sufferings.

A pile that big if you or anyone walked in they wouldn't be able to take their eyes off it. You can't. See that's the problem with sufferings. Whether caused by our sins or caused simply because we live in a fallen world, sufferings grab our attention. We can't forget we're depressed or feeling pain. We try and put the losses and hurts behind us. We bury resentment and heartache deep. But eventually the big pile of suffering and sins gets our attention again. There can be no longing for a future when all we can see is the suffering of the present.

What if while all of you were sitting over here on one side over here on this side, on a small table, all by itself I put a diamond? Sparkling and shining. That would get attention. You might even forget how tightly packed you were and you'd concentrate on the diamond. How big is it? What's it worth? Your perspective would change. That pile of all our present sufferings and sins can seem overwhelming and painful. But if opposite that pile was a bright shiny diamond of truth our perspective would change. Paul speaks of the diamond, **"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."** There's no comparison. Your sufferings and sins are insignificant. They're temporary. They're small and momentary when compared with the future glory that's coming.

Paul struggles to describe that future glory. He could never describe future glory fully. So he speaks in terms of the longing it evokes in those who hear the promise of its coming. He includes how creation will react. Creation isn't human beings but rather the rocks, trees, animals, and other inanimate objects in the world. **"The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope."** The glory is so good even the rocks and trees, which aren't going to participate in the glory of heaven, long for it. That coming glory means the end of their frustration. The sinfulness of the created world wasn't by choice. Human beings brought sin and frustration. God chose to let the world suffer in sin along with humans. But future glory means all that goes away. Creation longs for that, and as the world longs for it so do we.

Future glory means the suffering of the present is not God punishing us. Paul shared in the verse right before our section, **"Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory."** We take comfort in suffering because of Christ. His sufferings counted for something. Christ's sufferings count in our place. Our sufferings aren't earning us anything. They're reminding us we're connected to Christ. We share in his sufferings so we might share in his glory. And share in it we will. It's the future. It's the promise and hope we have. It's the hope we exist in. Hope of a Savior. Jesus is our hope of being set free. Though hidden, it's a hope we already have as children of God through Christ.

We long for glory and God allows us to suffer with purpose. It reminds that this earth isn't the end. Our sufferings cause us to long for future glory from God. To long for that day when we will be totally and completely set free from sufferings. To long for Christ's return and rescue. Now we strain our eyes to look beyond the sufferings to his promises. Get up on our tip toes so we can see past the hurt and pain and sin of today to the glory that awaits us in heaven. That's balancing present sufferings with future glory.

If that diamond were in your hands with a certificate of ownership with your name on it, you'd no longer look at the table and hope it could be yours. It would be yours. Why hope anymore? That's what God is doing for you and me right now. His great mercy and love allows us to see our sufferings. Our big pile of sufferings and sins keeps getting bigger. But remember the diamond, the good news that Christ suffered in your place? That diamond isn't sitting on the table for you to hope and wish it was yours. It is already yours. You have a certificate of ownership. By grace God turns your eyes from your big pile of sufferings to his wonderful promises of future glory in Christ. Now the glory is the only thing you and I wait for. It's ours but if we already saw it and existed in it we wouldn't long for it. So we must patiently endure waiting for that future glory.

Because the waiting is the hardest part we can't always say we're waiting with patient endurance. During the grueling times we might get off track and lose our way. Sometimes it's more like complaining impatience. We want proof and we want it now. Or it's more like grumbling wondering if it will ever happen. Sometimes all those sins we commit cause more sufferings which bring us down.

God knows the waiting is long. So he points us to the Savior he sent. Remember Jesus won victory for you. Remember he proclaimed it finished. Remember his resurrection assures you of victory because that resurrection is yours. And remember the Holy Spirit he sent. **"Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved."** The Holy Spirit is the down payment of our salvation. We aren't waiting to hear if we're saved or not. We're not wondering if God could save a sinner like you or me. We know we're saved. Okay, we're not fully in heaven, but that will come soon. The Holy Spirit is the foretaste of something big, some future glory we can't even imagine.

We've waited a long time already and we'll wait longer if the Lord gives us tomorrow. God assures us it's worth the wait. The Holy Spirit leads us to patient endurance. God uses suffering to build up that endurance. **"Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently."** Through the suffering God promises he's with us. We lean on him. We trust him. We endure because Jesus endured for us. We're patient because the promises of the Word of God belong to us, because we partake of the Lord's Supper, and because we remember our baptisms. Any patient endurance we have comes from God.

All your sufferings and sins piled up in one place would be a sight you'd rather forget. Yet we can't and we can't take our eyes off it either. God gives us something else to focus on. There's future glory in Christ Jesus that God gives us freely. He invites us to balance our present sufferings with that future glory and realize there's no comparison. He also asks that we have patient endurance which he provides through the Holy Spirit. This future glory in Christ is ours and one day soon we'll enjoy it forever.