



INHERITING OUR FATHER'S FORTUNE

ROMANS 8:16-22

As believers in Christ, we are fellow heirs with Him of all God has to offer us. That inheritance means temporary suffering in this world but assurance of eternity in the presence of God in a perfect world.

Berti Adams was seventy-one years old when she died. The coroner's report read that she died of malnutrition. She had often begged for food in her neighborhood, and she always wore old clothing from secondhand stores. From all outward appearances, she was a penniless woman without a family to care for her.

As officials sifted through the rubbish and trash that filled her apartment, which had barely any furniture, they were able to identify her. They also found two keys from two local banks.

At one bank, they found in her safe deposit box stock certificates worth \$200,000 dollars! At the other bank, her large safe deposit box contained stacks and stacks of money. Berti Adams had been a millionaire!

Her only living family members were a distant nephew and niece. Can you imagine the phone call to them?

"Your Aunt Berti died—you know, the one who never took a bath, the one you never saw at Thanksgiving or Christmas. Well, she died and left you and your sister all her wealth."

"Her what?"

"Her wealth—just over one million dollars."¹

Imagine getting a call that you are the heir of an amazing estate. Well, the apostle Paul is making a call like that to you today. As we sail back into Romans chapter 8, we read his words in verses 16-17:

*The Spirit himself bears witness
with our spirit that we are children
of God, and if children, then
heirs—heirs of God and fellow
heirs with Christ.*

Imagine that! Jesus Christ died, and He left everything to us in His will. But then He rose again, able to deliver the benefits of His family's inheritance to everyone who believes in Him.

So, what is it that we have inherited? First of all, we inherit everything of God's estate. This Greek expression, "heirs of God," can be understood in two ways. Either we inherit every-

thing that God owns—which is a lot!—or we inherit God. Both are true: our inheritance is God Himself *and* everything God owns!

Now the value of an inheritance depends on the wealth of the one who leaves it to you. If you were my heir and I died tomorrow, you would inherit a mortgage, a stack of bills, and a pickup truck that needs an oil change.

But God has no debts, no stack of bills. He possesses everything, and He is giving it all to us.

Paul then goes on to tell us that belonging to the family of God also gives us a temporary inheritance while we await that eternal inheritance. And this temporary inheritance will be difficult—verses 17-18:

Provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. For I Consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

The word Paul uses here for “comparing” translates a Greek word that refers to measuring with weights and a scale. Paul effectively says, “Put all my troubles and trials on one side of the scale, and it is as light as a feather compared to the coming glory!

In other words, suffering has a way of preparing us for our inheritance in heaven. And our temporary sufferings cannot compare to our future, eternal glory.

As one author put it, our hurts are going to be followed by hallelujahs.² That is true. No mat-

ter the injury, the trial, the loss, the betrayal, the abuse, the ridicule, the illness, glory is just around the corner. We are moving from the hurts of earth to the hallelujahs of heaven.

Paul writes now with a touch of realism:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. (verses 19-22)

This word “groaning” gives us the key to avoiding discouragement or distraction by the world around us.

Paul speaks here of the groaning of creation. He uses a device called personification. He gives human attributes and emotions to elements of creation—plants, animals, and inanimate things like rivers, mountains, and planets. Paul’s saying that all of creation is longing for something. The Greek word for “longing” means to “stand on its tiptoes.”³

Creation is anticipating, Paul writes, “the revealing of the sons of God.” This is a reference to that future time when Christ remakes—refashions—a new universe and a new earth

(Revelation 21). Paul writes that creation cannot wait for this coming glory.

But in the meantime, Paul tells us that creation has been damaged by the fall of man into sin:

For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption. (verses 20-21)

This takes us back to the fall of man in the garden of Eden. God told Adam, “Cursed is the ground because of you” (Genesis 3:17). Since the fall, decay and disease have been built into the very fabric of nature. “Floods, hurricanes, droughts, tornadoes, blights, avalanches, and earthquakes stalk the earth.”⁴ Paul is saying that these are the sounds of earth’s groanings, of its longing for something better to come.

In verse 22, Paul compares earth’s groaning to the pain of childbirth. In other words, just as a woman in labor agonizes in pain yet anticipates the birth of her child and freedom from that pain, so creation is in pain because of sin, and it is anticipating that new and perfected creation.

Paul’s message is this: things are bad now because of sin, but God will make all things new. The groaning and the suffering and the pain are not going to last forever. They will soon be all but forgotten.

By the way, have you ever noticed that no husband who has children ever carries around a picture of his wife in labor! For one thing, his

wife is not going to let him. But he would not do that anyway. He is carrying around pictures of his newborn baby.

There is coming a day when the agony will be over. The pain and suffering of a fallen world, a fallen animal kingdom, a fallen, sinful, human race, will come to an end. It will end, not because nature fixed itself or mankind rescued it, but because God Himself will renew all of creation in that coming day.

We cannot even imagine the pictures we could take of the new heaven and new earth. That will be what we carry around, so to speak, one day.

John Newton, the hymnwriter of “Amazing Grace,” put this into perspective for us today. He wrote:

“Suppose a man was going to take possession of a large estate which he had inherited. It’s a vast and wealthy estate with a magnificent home, complete with gardens and fields. But during the last mile in his journey to the inheritance, his [carriage] broke down, forcing him to walk; [can you imagine seeing him] wringing his hands, and complaining, ‘My [carriage] is broken! My [carriage] is broken! [What shall I do? . . . I have lost my old carriage]?’”⁵

That is a convicting thought isn’t it, beloved? How are we thinking and acting through the difficulty and suffering we experience today? What is our perspective on life as we travel the final mile to our inheritance?

Let’s not live as if we are impoverished or forgotten. We are heirs to the fortune of our

Father; and in just another mile or two, we will arrive at home.

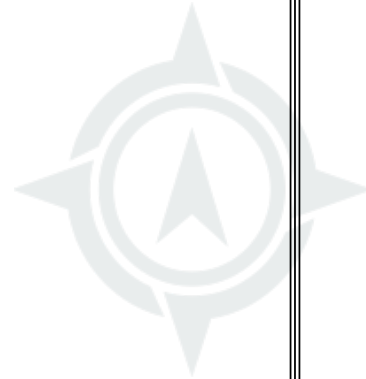
Consider the call to believers as heirs of God's inheritance. How does the promise of being fellow heirs with Christ impact your understanding of your spiritual identity and worth?

Discuss the concept of creation's groaning and longing for redemption. How can an understanding of the fallen nature of the world and its anticipation of restoration affect your attitude towards environmental stewardship and caring for God's creation?

Share a personal experience where you faced a trial or suffering but found hope and encouragement in the promise of your future glory as a child of God and fellow heir with Christ.

How can you encourage fellow believers to embrace their identity as heirs of God's inheritance and maintain a hopeful perspective in the face of life's challenges?

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¹R. Kent Hughes, *1001 Great Stories and Quotes* (Tyndale House, 1998), 359.

²Ray Stedman, "The Agony and the Ecstasy," Raystedman.com.

³Ralph Earle, *Word Meanings in the New Testament* (Baker Book House, 1989), 179.

⁴R. Kent Hughes, *Romans: Righteousness from Heaven* (Crossway, 1991), 160.

⁵Quoted in Richard Cecil, *Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton, in The Works of the Rev. John Newton*, Vol. 1 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 108.