

Romans 8:18-21 “*Secure Sufferers*”**

Series: “*The Secure Struggler – An Exposition of Romans 8*”¹

Main Idea: According to Romans 8:1-21, we are *secure sufferers*. We are *secure* (we see that in verses 1-17). We are also *sufferers* (as we’ll see today in verses 18-21). And it’s the Holy Spirit who makes this secure suffering possible.

- I. We are *secure sufferers* (1-17).
 - A. We can be sure of our position (1-16).
 - 1. The Spirit brands the ears.
 - 2. The Spirit brands the feet.
 - B. We can be sure of our privileges (17).
 - 1. We identify with Christ's suffering now.
 - 2. We will identify with Christ's glory later.
- II. We are *secure sufferers* (18-21).
 - A. How should we respond to suffering? (18)
 - 1. We should expect it.
 - 2. We should look beyond it.
 - B. How does creation respond to suffering? (19-21)
 - 1. It waits (19).
 - 2. It was subjected (20).
 - 3. It will be liberated (21).

Take Inventory: Let’s ask ourselves two questions...

- 1. Do I have a biblical understanding of eternal security?
- 2. Do I have a biblical understanding of suffering?

Scripture Memory Song (“Redeemed people sing the Word”): Isaiah 46:3-4

Today as we return to our journey through Romans 8, we’re going to see that *secure strugglers* are also *secure sufferers*. The question is how. To begin, I want us to see an important word in today’s text. You’ll find it in verse 18.

“For I *consider*.” This is Paul speaking. He says he *considered* something. The AV says, “For I reckon.” “Reckon denotes a firm conviction reached by rational thought on the basis of the gospel,” explains commentator C. E. B. Cranfield.² That means Paul thought carefully about something. Don’t miss this. Thinking is critical in the Christian life. One of the main agendas for the Holy Spirit is to help us think rightly.

We’ve noticed the repetition of the words “Spirit” and “mind” in the first part of Romans 8. And here’s one topic where we need the Spirit’s help if we are to think rightly. “For I consider that the *sufferings of this present world*. Paul said he thought very specific thoughts about suffering. How can we tell if a person is under the control of the Holy Spirit? Paul shows us right here. One primary evidence of the Spirit’s working is seen in how a person thinks about suffering.

With that in mind let’s read and ponder and exalt in the Giver of today’s text.

Scripture Reading: Romans 8:18-21

Suffering is a part of life. We face it every day. Every one of us. We suffer. The people around us suffer. The creation itself suffers. Suffering comes in all shapes and sizes. And what should we do about it? Here’s one thing we must do.

Consider. Reckon. It’s vital that we think rightly about suffering. Sometimes a good story can help as C. S. Lewis demonstrated. If you haven’t read or listened to his

** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the Romans 8 series preached at WBC in 1995.

² C. E. B. Cranfield, Romans, p. 194.

Chronicles of Narnia, I encourage you to do so. Back in 2021 Randy Alcorn gave a talk entitled *Heaven* at a C.S. Lewis Institute livestream event. It's quite helpful and I'd like to share some highlights with you.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:17, "this light and momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison". Check out 2 Corinthians 11 sometime for a record of what Paul is calling light and momentary afflictions. You could think, *This guy, whoever he is, he doesn't really know the kinds of afflictions that I've been facing*. Well, Paul lists these light and momentary afflictions: prison, flogging, five times the forty-lashes-minus-one, three times beaten with rods, stoned, shipwrecked, a day and night spent in the open sea, rivers, bandits. He talks about danger from Jews, danger from Gentiles, danger everywhere he went, often without sleep, hungry, thirsty, naked, cold. And he says that on top of everything else is this anxiety that he has for the churches. Again, if this is light and momentary, what could Paul be talking about? Does it seem almost offensive?

My wife is in stage-4 cancer right now; it's in her lymph nodes. Our dear dog is dying of cancer; a close friend's wife is struggling with dementia. So does it seem like an insult to call these light and momentary sufferings? What we have to do, I think, is weigh them against what's on the other side of the scales. That's what Paul is saying to do. That's the "eternal weight of glory."

Maybe you feel like your sufferings are like the Rock of Gibraltar. That's really heavy, incredibly heavy. But then what if on the other side of the scales God placed the planet Jupiter? or a galaxy? or the universe itself? Then all of a sudden, you'd go *Wow! Okay!* This is the eternal weight of glory. And that's what God is telling us in Romans 8:20 and following where Paul has said what he does about light and momentary afflictions, or a parallel passage, that is. He says, "For the creation was subjected to futility" as we human stewards fell, the whole creation fell under us, it fell on our coattails. This is a curse, and God has put into us a nostalgia for an Eden that we've never really known. We've never really experienced Eden firsthand, but we have this sense that that's the way it's supposed to be, and that something is badly wrong with the world, and that's what Romans 8 is telling us. Something *is* badly wrong. At the end of verse 20 and in verse 21, it says: "...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." The same creation that fell on humanity's coattails shall rise on its coattails. That's what we're told in this great passage. Verse 22 says: "For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now."³

That's so good. That's precisely the way *secure sufferers* think. They don't minimize the present suffering. But they refuse to think *only* about the present suffering. They constantly remind themselves (and others) of what is coming.

This is the message of Romans 8:1-21. We are *secure sufferers*. We are *secure* (that's what we have seen in verses 1-17). We are also *sufferers* (as we'll see today in verses 18-21). And it's the Holy Spirit who makes this secure suffering possible.

³ <https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/resources/heaven-and-the-new-earth-from-the-bible-and-c-s-lewis/>

I. We are *secure* sufferers (1-17).

Our security is linked to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. We may live in an unstable world, but if we have the Holy Spirit, we are secure. We have security. What does that mean? Because of the Spirit, we can be sure of two realities.

A. We can be sure of our position (1-16). As we've seen in previous weeks, Paul has much to say about our position in the first sixteen verses of Romans 8.

He tells us in verse 1, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." No condemnation. Amazing. Talk about a secure position! And who protects us in this secure position? The Holy Spirit does. Paul mentions the Holy Spirit eleven times in the first eleven verses and gives this wonderful summary of life in the Spirit in verse 11. "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you."

God the Holy Spirit is the One who guarantees our place in the family. He lives in us. He gives life to these bodies even as He did to Jesus' lifeless body when He raised Him from the dead.

Yet, as we saw last week, there's more. There are four benefits which we are entitled to enjoy if we have the Holy Spirit (and all who have Christ have the Spirit). If we have the Spirit, we may enjoy the benefits of *sanctification* (12-13), *supervision* (14), *sonship* (15), and *security* (16-17). The Spirit *sanctifies* us, that is, He is the change agent in our lives. He *supervises* us which means He leads us through life. The Spirit bears witness to our *sonship*--as sons, we have access to God and intimacy with God. And the Spirit grants us *security* in the inevitable suffering that comes our way.

Paul describes our security this way in verse 16, "The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." To reiterate something we said last time, it's the Holy Spirit's job to give assurance. We can't do it. Yet we try.

Parents, how many of you have heard one of your children pray "the sinner's prayer"? It's a wonderful thing to hear our littles call on God and ask Him to save them. But here's the reality. We don't know what really happened in their little hearts. Did they truly repent and believe in Christ? Or were they merely trying to please us?

Please don't misunderstand. If a child (or a person of any age) repents of his sin and trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ, that person is saved. Instantly. That's not the question. The question is, "Can you (or should you) give assurance to that person?"

Yes, a Christian can have assurance of his or her salvation. But where does that assurance come from? Paul says the Spirit is the One who bears witness with our spirit, giving us the assurance that we are secure.

We have a problem today in the American church. There are thousands and even millions of church members who have assurance who should *not*, because their assurance comes from man and not the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, there are countless others who lack assurance, yet need *not* lack it. They lack assurance because they are listening to other witnesses (primarily the powerful witness of their own feelings) and ignoring the Holy Spirit's witness.

"How can I tell the difference?" you ask. "How can I know if the Spirit is bearing witness to my security? Will He whisper in my heart, 'You're saved'?" No. It's much more objective than that. When the Holy Spirit enters our lives, He brands us. So look for His branding marks.

Have you ever seen a branding mark on an animal? I raised cattle when I was young. We put tags in the ears of our animals which accomplished the same objective. What is the purpose of a brand mark? It's the visible evidence of ownership. When a rancher brands a calf, he is saying, "That animal belongs to me." And whoever sees that branding mark knows who that animal belongs to.

This is precisely what the Holy Spirit does for a believer in Christ. He brands the true child of God. Jesus said in John 10:27 that there are two branding marks in the life of a true sheep (I am indebted to Pastor David Dernlan for this analogy).

1. *The Spirit brands the ears.* "My sheep *hear* my voice," said Jesus. The true Christian has the mark of the Spirit on his ear. The Spirit produces in the child of God is a love for Word of God. True sheep love to listen to the voice of their Shepherd.

2. *The Spirit brands the feet.* The second branding mark is on the feet. Jesus says, "And they *follow* me." A true Christian walks in Jesus' steps. He is a doer. What he hears Jesus say, he does. In the Great Commission, Jesus gives this instruction about disciple-making, "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you (AV Matthew 28:20)."

Now plug this in to Romans 8. How does the Spirit bear witness with our spirit that we are the children of God? How does He give us assurance? As I see these two branding marks in my life, I am receiving the witness of God the Holy Spirit that I belong to God the Father, that I am indeed His child.

Again, I must share my heart with you. As your pastor I am concerned for individuals whose names are on our church roll who don't seem to exhibit the branding marks of the Spirit on their ears or feet.

You say, "Well that's judging. You don't know the person's heart." And you're certainly right. But I do know this. Hebrews 13:17 tells me that as a pastor I will give an account for your souls. This is why I'm urging you to look carefully. And ask others to look with you. Do you see the branding marks? Do you see evidence of the Spirit's assurance?

It's fairly objective, when you think about it. If I love to learn and live according to the Word of God, I'm demonstrating that I'm cooperating with the Spirit of God who is intent on producing those in me. If I don't see these evidences, I'm demonstrating that either I don't have the Spirit or I'm resisting His work.

We who have the Spirit can be sure of our position. He bears witness with our spirit and gives us the certain confidence that we are the children of God. Yes, trials will come. And so will doubts at time. But the Spirit makes it clear that our position in the family of God is secure forever (consider John 10:28-29; 1 John 5:11-13).

Because of the Spirit, we can be sure of a second reality as well.

B. We can be sure of our privileges (17). Listen to Paul's description of our privileges in verse 17. "And if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."

Friends, the Christian life as an identification with Christ. When we were saved, we were "united to Christ" (see Romans 6:3-4). But that union with Christ was merely the beginning. In verse 17 we learn that this union involves two other privileges, one is in the present, the other in the future.

1. *We identify with Christ's suffering now.* We'll see more about this in a moment in verse 18. But what I want you to grasp now is that even heirs of God suffer. Christ did, and we who identify with Christ will suffer in the present.

2. *We will identify with Christ's glory later.* Again, the apostle will develop this more fully in the next section of Romans 8, but for now, let's not lose sight of the obvious. The Christian's security is linked to Christ. We can be sure of our position and of our privileges because of Christ. Because of our union with Christ, we are eternally secure. And because of the Holy Spirit's ministry, we can know we are secure. We are *secure* sufferers.

Now let's consider the other side of this. We are secure *sufferers*.

II. We are secure *sufferers* (18-21).

When I think about suffering, I am reminded of a statement once made by the German pastor and theologian, Helmut Thielicke. When asked to identify the greatest problem he observed in the USA, he replied, "They have an inadequate view of suffering."⁴

And the problem isn't just out there. It's closer to home. Many church-going evangelicals fail to recognize the purpose of suffering in God's plan. We may be in that number. If so, it's because we're failing to *reckon* the way Paul did. We think suffering is a mistake and are prone to dread it, contrary to James 1:2 which commands us, "Count it all joy when you face various trials." Or we tend to focus on the suffering and fail to remember what's coming after the suffering. Because of this we're inclined to refuse to cooperate with God and allow Him to accomplish His purpose in the suffering.

If Romans 8 is Christian Living 101, for many people Romans 8:18 is Christian Living 401. It's sort of an upper-level class that many Christians have never taken, so that when the suffering comes, they lack security in the struggle.

But the Lord wants us to be secure in our suffering. That's why He gave us passages like Romans 8. He addresses two questions about suffering in verses 18-21.

A. How should we respond to suffering? (18) Listen again to verse 18, "For I consider [AV "reckon"] that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us."

There's an important connection that I want us to see. It's the connection between verse 5 and verse 18. Back in verse 5 Paul said, "Those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit." Now in verse 18 he says, "For I consider." Paul himself is providing a wonderful example of what it looks like to set one's mind on the things of the Spirit. The way Paul thought about suffering is not natural, but supernatural. On our own we do not think this way. When I lose my job, or receive some bad news from the doctor, or face persecution for Christ, I won't respond the way Paul does here unless I am setting my mind on the things of the Spirit.

How does a mind set on the Spirit respond to suffering? According to Paul, in two ways. First, I expect it. Second, I look beyond it. Let's ponder these carefully.

1. *We should expect it.* Back in verse 17 the AV uses the phrase, "if so be that we suffer with Him." The "if" should be translated "since" for suffering isn't optional in the Christian life. As the ESV says, "provided we suffer with him."

⁴ From Phillip Yancey, *Open Windows*, p. 73

Listen again to James, the half-brother of Jesus. “My brothers, count it all joy *when* you face various trials (1:2).” Peter informs us of the same in 1 Peter 2:21, “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.” Later Peter wrote in 1 Peter 4:12, “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.”

Over and over the Word of God says we should expect suffering. That doesn't mean that we should be masochistic, nor pessimistic, but realistic. We are living in a fallen, broken, sin-cursed world.

Some will say, “But there's healing in the atonement! It's not God's will for His children to suffer. He wants His children to be healthy and wealthy. Isn't that true?”

The answer is, *yes*, followed by a question, *when*? Yes there's healing, but when in God's plan will the child of God experience the fullness of this healing? In this life? No. Not until the life to come. That's the whole point of verse 18, isn't it? The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory *that is to be revealed to us*. That's future.

So how should we respond to suffering? We start right here. We should *expect* it. But we must not stop there.

2. *We should look beyond it.* This word “consider” in verse 18 is an accounting term. It's as if Paul pulls out the ledger books and does some calculating. He sees the sufferings of this life in one column, and in the next column he sees the glory which shall be ours in the life to come, and he comes to this conclusion. There's really no comparison. The latter far outweighs the former.

Just think of it, my friends. We know how great the present suffering is. We know the pain of losing loved ones, the turmoil of receiving a terminal diagnosis, the agony of loneliness, and the injustice of being mistreated for Christ. We know the greatness of this pain. We feel it. Those we love are feeling it.

Yet Paul says, “Multiply that pain by one thousand and you won't even begin to approach the magnitude of glory that will be revealed in us one day!”

So what should be our attitude towards this suffering? On the one hand, we should expect it, *yes*. But on the other hand, we should look beyond it. We must look beyond it. As a believer, I mustn't focus merely on today's sufferings, but must always be looking forward to tomorrow's promised glory! (see 2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

I'd like to offer a practical word about helping people who are going through times of suffering. How do you bring comfort to someone? In his book, *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*, physician Dr. Paul Brand writes:

Along with most doctors I know, I often feel inadequate in the face of real suffering... We fight back the lumps in our throats, march resolutely to the hospital for visits, mumble a few cheerful words, perhaps look up articles on what to say to the grieving. But when I ask patients and their families, 'What helped you in your suffering?' I hear a strange, imprecise answer. The person described rarely has smooth answers or a winsome, effervescent personality. It is someone quiet, understanding, who listens more than he talks, who does not judge or even offer much advice. 'A sense of presence.' 'Someone there when I needed him.' A hand to hold, an understanding, bewildered hug. A shared lump in the throat.⁵

⁵ From Paul Brand, *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*.

There's the first question Paul addresses. How should we respond to suffering? Yet this first question leads to a second question which Paul addresses in verses 19-21.

B. How does creation respond to suffering? (19-21) Think about something, friends. Human beings are not the only ones suffering in this world. Warren Wiersbe rightly points out there are three "groans" in Romans 8. Creation groans (18-22). Believers groan (23-25). The Holy Spirit groans (25-30). Creation is personified in this section. In response to its suffering, the created realm engages in three activities.

1. *It waits (19)*. Verse 19 tells us, "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God."⁶ What does that mean? The background is Genesis 3. When Adam sinned the first sin, Adam wasn't the only one affected by the consequences. The future human race was affected. So too was the whole created order. And right now, creation is waiting for the sons of God to be revealed. More about that in a moment. What happened to the created order? Verse 20 tells us what happened.

2. *It was subjected (20)* "For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope." The AV says, "For the creation was made subject to vanity, not willingly but by reason of him who has subjected the same in hope."

Who subjected creation? Paul doesn't identify the subjector. Some say Adam did it. Others suggest Satan did it. "But the most natural interpretation," suggests Everett Harrison, "is that which postulates God as the one who did the subjecting."⁷

I don't think most of us think about creation this way (as being subjected to futility). Let me illustrate. Have you ever been to the Rocky Mountains? Suppose we were standing together on Pike's Peak right now. We smell the clean crisp air. We look as far as eye can see at the beautiful trees. We hear the rippling sounds of the mountain streams. And suppose, in the grandeur of that moment, one of us cries out, "Isn't it wonderful to enjoy creation just the way God made it?"

My friends, such a scene is certainly beautiful, but the truth is what we are seeing today is not as it once was. We are seeing a creation that has been subjected to futility. Paul uses the word "creation" four times in this section, in verse 19, in verse 20, in verse 21, and again in verse 22. In the final verse Paul says that creation is "groaning in the pains of childbirth."

What happened to creation? What happened is that the first man and woman sinned. You know the story. It's in Genesis 3. And Adam's sin produced a terrible effect on the created order. Indeed, until man is restored, creation continues to groan.

Think of cancer cells and rattlesnakes. Think of tornados and hardening of the arteries. Think of virus like COVID-19. These all contribute to the groaning of creation. But the day is coming when all sub-human life will follow in the footsteps of a redeemed humanity and function as it did in Eden's paradise, to the praise and glory of the Creator Himself.

Listen to C. E. B. Cranfield, "We may think of the whole magnificent theatre of the universe together with all its splendid properties and all the chorus of sub-human life, created to glorify God but unable to do so fully, so long as man, the chief actor in the drama of God's praise, fails to contribute his rational part."⁸

⁶ AV "For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God."

⁷ Everett Harrison, *Romans*, p. 94.

⁸ C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans*, p. 196.

This is what creation is waiting for. The birds. The trees. The rivers. The insects. “Paul sees the coming glory of believers,” explains Cranfield, “not by itself but accompanied by the glorious liberation of the whole sub-human creation.”⁹

This is why so many love the Chronicles of Narnia where C. S. Lewis portrays this reality as beautifully as anyone. You might read the final book in the Narnia series this afternoon. Listen to Lewis’s beautiful portrayal of the new earth in *The Last Battle*:

“All of the old Narnia that mattered, all the dear creatures, have been drawn into the real Narnia through the Door. And of course it is different; as different as a real thing is from a shadow or as waking life is from a dream.” . . . The new [Narnia] was a deeper country: every rock and flower and blade of grass looked as if it meant more. I can’t describe it any better than that: if you ever get there, you will know what I mean.”¹⁰

Yes, friends, this is a broken, sin-cursed world. Creation is marred. It groans. It's waiting because it's in bondage. Thistles, disease, death, and decay all entered the world after the fall of Adam (Genesis 3:18-19). What we see is a created order that was subjected. Evolution says things are getting better and better, but that’s not true. Things wear out. Our bodies wear out. My car wears out. Roads wear out. Our teeth wear out. And creation is groaning! Will the groaning ever end? Yes! How?

3. *It will be liberated* (21). Verse 21 says, “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.”¹¹ Notice the connection between the future of the created order and the future of the “children of God” (also in verse 19). The outcome of creation is tied to the outcome of God's children. Creation will be set free when redeemed human beings are set free.

By the way, this points out that God doesn't merely “save souls.” That's Greek thinking. To picture the eternal state as disembodied spirits floating around some clouds is based more on Plato than the Bible. When God redeems people, He rescues the whole person, body as well as soul. And He also is preparing a place for His redeemed people to live with Him. A real place. A new, transformed, glorious earth.

Heaven is where your spirit goes when you die, my Christian friend, but it’s not where you will live forever. God Himself will bring heaven down to a liberated, transformed paradise on earth, like Eden only better.

We long for that day, don’t we? And so does creation itself. Even now, creation is groaning in anticipation of that day.

What's the point? Why does Paul tell us how creation responds to suffering? Namely, to give us hope. You see, it's not only our bodies that will one day be redeemed, but this entire, physical universe is going to be overhauled. The day is coming when all who know Christ are going to trade in this old earth for a new earth.¹²

I can’t say it any better than Randy Alcorn, so listen again to this dear brother as he talks about what’s coming for believers:

⁹ Cranfield, p. 197.

¹⁰ <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/c-s-lewis-on-heaven-and-the-new-earth-gods-eternal-remedy-to-the-problem-of-evil-and-suffering>

¹¹ AV “Because the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.”

¹² McGee, p. 151.

Do you love the beauty of this earth? I do. I love to dive, I love to snorkel for hours on end. You can't do a lot of that in Oregon, but it's just something I thrill to enjoy, and you may love flowers and gardens, and I think we all love forests and the great lakes of the world and all of that. If there's going to be a new earth and a new Jerusalem, which we are told there is going to be, why not a new Mt. Everest? Why not a new Lake Victoria? Why not a new Grand Canyon? In Matthew 19, Jesus said — these are His words — “at the renewal of all things.” Now all things, in the Greek, means all things, which is why all the Greek experts translate it all things. “When the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” [v. 28]. Renewal is one of the many “re” words in the Bible, there's redemption, regeneration, restoration, reconciliation, resurrection. Sometimes we miss those “re” words because of the way we pronounce them, but re means going back. It doesn't mean creating something that's never been. It means restoring something that's been lost, and now it's in a better than- ever form. In Acts 3:21, Peter said that Christ must remain in heaven “until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.” Again, His mission is not obliteration; it's restoration! So what does it mean that one day God will restore everything? Again, it means the biblical doctrine of the new earth, and the great thing is that if we realize this, we will no longer have to have bucket lists. We will no longer have to grab for everything we can grab in this world because, you know, you only go around once. This is our only opportunity to really experience the wonders and joys and beauties of this world. No, it's not! The best is yet to come so if you're disappointed because there were things you really would have liked to do, things that were on your bucket list and now you're realizing you're not going to be able to do because of your own health, or maybe your spouse's health or your financial situation. Whatever it is, for whatever reasons you can't do some of the things you longed to do, the best is yet to come! We do not pass our peaks in this life. So don't let the evil one fool you into thinking that you have passed your peak.¹³

Again, so helpful! The best is yet to come, brothers and sisters. The sufferings of this present time are truly not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us. Listen again to Randy Alcorn as he concludes his message:

And so let me finish where Lewis finishes the *Chronicles of Narnia*. What a picture of what awaits us in the world to come. And, by the way, remember that Lewis is writing fiction, but God is writing in Revelation 21 and 22 and other passages blood-bought promises. It is by the blood of Jesus that these truths and eternal realities are guaranteed. So just luxuriate as I have as I was rereading this this morning.

In the last chapter of *The Last Battle*, “Farewell to Shadowlands,” Aslan gives the children shocking news that's really, ultimately, good news. He says, “There was a real railway accident.” Remember, that's how the book began; it seemed like there was an accident but they didn't know. And then Aslan says, “Your father and mother and all of you are — as you used to call it in the

¹³ <https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/resources/heaven-and-the-new-earth-from-the-bible-and-c-s-lewis/>

Shadowlands — dead. The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning.”

Lewis continues, “And as [Aslan] spoke, He no longer looked to them like a lion.” Guess what he began to look like? I think the Savior, Jesus. The book ends:

He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.

Take Inventory: Let’s ask ourselves two questions...

1. *Do I have a biblical understanding of eternal security?* My friend, do you know for sure what’s going to happen to you when you die? Do you know for sure you are going to heaven? You can. Repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. And His Spirit will give you the assurance that you are saved? Is He doing that for you? Do you see His branding marks on your life?

2. *Do I have a biblical understanding of suffering?* Oh dear friends, we need a robust theology of suffering, for secure sufferers suffer securely. So study what the Bible teaches about suffering. And study some more. Start with this text and follow the chain references throughout the Bible. And then read Jerry Bridges *Trusting God: Even When Life Hurts*, and read it again, and again. And memorize James 1:2-5 and Romans 8:28-29. And listen (or read) the messages from our 2012 series *Promises to Live By in the Crucible of Suffering*.

You say, “Studying is hard for me.” Okay, here’s the good news. The Holy Spirit will help you. Indeed, this is what Spirit-filled living looks like. “Those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit (Romans 8:5).”

Closing Song: #353 “A Shelter in the Time of Storm” (all four verses)

This afternoon: Community groups

Community Group Discussion:

1. Today we looked at Romans 8:18-21 in a message entitled, “*Secure Sufferers*.” Take a few moments and read this passage together.
2. Everyone living in this sin-cursed world suffers, but Christians can be *secure* in their suffering. In your own words, describe a *secure* sufferer. What’s the difference between a secure sufferer and an *insecure* sufferer?
3. In verse 18 Paul refers to “the sufferings of this present time”. What were some ways that Paul suffered in his life? What’s the worst suffering you have ever experienced?
4. Also in verse 18, Paul draws a staggering conclusion regarding suffering. What is his conclusion? Verse 18 is a great verse to encourage sufferers. How so?
5. In verses 19-21 Paul points our attention to creation. What can we learn about being secure sufferers by thinking about creation?
6. As we’ll see in verses 26-27, secure sufferers are people who pray. Spend some time as a group praying for those who are suffering at WBC.