

Script: Pastor Frank R. Johnson

The Glory and the Dream: Toward Godly Aspiration and Grateful Contentment  
“Three Tentative Conclusions, II”  
Romans 8:18, 28, 39, and much more

Take a first look.

I. Last time, we ended with these three affirmations from the book of Romans:

1. ***“For I consider that the sufferings of the present time [kairos] are not comparable to the glory that is about to be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18, FJV).***

2. ***“For we know that for the ones who keep on loving God, He works all things together for good, for the ones who are called according to a purpose” (Romans 8:28, FJV).***

3. And finally, ***“Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:39, FJV, my emphasis).*** As we are waiting for that consummate moment of fulfillment to come, we must learn to cope with the following real issues.

II. That led us to **tentative conclusion #1: *The promises of God will certainly be fulfilled, but on His schedule not ours.***

Take a closer look at 2 more tentative conclusions.

I. **Tentative conclusion #2: Here are several challenges both to godly aspiration and grateful contentment:**

1. ***Waiting.*** Patience is still a virtue, and it is hard-won. The passing of time is itself a hardship, especially when nothing much seems to be happening. We American Christians are schooled to expect visible, measurable results. The Mission Board of our own tribe of Jesus' followers will support a pastor who is starting a new church for about 3 years, with a possible extension of a year or so. After that, he is on his own. I have often wondered if this approach fits with God's sense of timing. Is God on a 3-year plan? I doubt it very much. To give the mission board leaders the benefit of the doubt, I am hopeful they are doing the best they can with the resources they have, and they are seemingly trying to be equitable to those they support. But we cannot give up just because the Kingdom does not come in 36 months. Every rule such as this one becomes arbitrary while trying to be equitable, because none of us can see the future the way God can. We must learn to persevere in doing the right thing, in life and in service to God, and wait patiently and with grateful contentment for His blessing on the work. Maybe it will come right away. Maybe it will take a lifetime to prepare for the blessing to come on the second or third generation (or in 400 years, as with Abraham, or after 70 years of exile as with Jeremiah). We need both short-term goals and a long-term sense of God's providence.

This sense of the necessary passing of time is true of all human accomplishments. Remember the story about the man catching a ride from a New York taxi? He hopped into the cab and immediately asked the driver, “How do I get to Carnegie Hall?” Without hesitation, the cab driver answered, “Practice, man, practice!” Sure enough, the professional musician practices every day just to maintain the skills that have been learned over a lifetime of daily practice. No one really learns a foreign language in a day. No one gains the skills of management and persuasive communication in a week or a month. The golf pro makes the game look effortless on TV (almost boringly so), because he hits 600-1,000 golf balls in practice every day.

A—**Patience is character formed from the discipline of repeated virtuous actions over time, even when there is not much measurable progress day by day, and often with the lack of frequent positive reinforcement.**

**Romans 8:18 (FJV)** helps us here: “**For I consider that the sufferings of the present time [kairos] are not comparable to the glory that is about to be revealed in us.**” Waiting with patience is the art of trusting God over the long haul, not just in a moment.

**2. Suffering.** There is no question that our Lord and His Apostles expected suffering to be a part of the Christian life. Begin reading the New Testament almost anywhere and you will get to this theme quite soon. One of the last things Jesus said to his closest followers on the eve of His arrest and crucifixion was this: **John 16:33 (FJV): “I have spoken these things to you<sup>p</sup> in order that in Me you<sup>p</sup> might have peace; in the world you<sup>p</sup> have affliction, but have courage; I have conquered the world.”** “*In the world you have affliction.*” Why would we now think that this will not be true for us, if we are serious about following Jesus today? Patience is learning to wait. Endurance or perseverance is forged in the soul when we learn to wait, even through hardship and affliction. The Psalmist writes, (**Psalm 119:67, NET**): “**Before I was afflicted, I used to stray off, but now I keep your instructions.**”

The Apostle Paul echoes this perspective in **Romans 5:3-5 (FJV)**: “Now not only this, but also we keep on boasting in these afflictions, knowing that this affliction keeps on producing perseverance, and perseverance approved character, and approved character hope. And this hope is not disappointing us, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit Who was given to us” (my emphasis). *Affliction leads to perseverance which leads to approved character which leads to hope which leads to a transforming experience of the love of God.*

A—So, we should steel ourselves for hardship.

—No professional hockey team wins games without much physical and mental training—self-inflicted suffering, we might say. The repeated wind sprints, the pumping of iron, the running of plays until they are second nature—all these experiences of scheduled hardship prepare for the challenge of the Olympic Games. Obviously, **Team USA** prepared for the Winter Games in 2026, and it showed when they brought home the Gold Medal (over Canada, no less 😊).

The book of Hebrews makes a different comparison. It says in **Hebrews 12:9-10 (FJV)**: “We have **our human fathers** as those who discipline, and we show respect; will we not much more be in subjection to the Father of the spirits and live? For they were disciplining us over a few days according to their discretion, but He brings it all together so that we may share in His holiness.” The point being made is this: “**Keep on patiently enduring [the hardships of life] as discipline; God is dealing with you<sup>p</sup> as sons. For which son is there which a father does not discipline?**” (**Hebrews 12:7, FJV**). As I have already argued, our Heavenly Father is mostly concerned with what kind of people we are becoming—people of godly virtue. Assuming this, then hardship can be seen in a new light. As I believe C. S. Lewis quipped somewhere, if we think of this world as a luxury hotel, it is supremely disappointing, but if we consider it a reform school, it’s really not half bad. It’s all a matter of perspective.

**3. Silence.** We have observed in the stories of Abraham, Joseph, the promise and the coming of the Messiah, and more, that often many years can pass without a perceptible change to the status quo. What is God up to in those intervening days, months, and years? Why does the passing of time often have to occur before God brings it all together in a meaningful moment? Between Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday, there was ... Saturday. A day of silence. A haunted Sabbath. Why so much *chronos* before the *kairos* of God’s fulfilled purposes? If only we knew. “We will understand it better by and by,” as the old song goes. It is clear from a reading of inspired Scripture that the passing of time is part of the deal in the human drama. Remember that our Jewish-Christian Bibles took 1400-1600 years to compile those 66 books. Learning to trust in the

clear promise of God and to follow the clear way of God in our present lives is key to fulfilling God's purposes, however long it takes for those purposes to be realized.

**4. Ingenious human solutions.** Remember these examples of how unfortunate it is when we try to speed up or assist God's plan by actions that put us into the ethical grey areas. **Abraham** attempted to fulfill God's calling and plan through **Hagar** rather than through his wife Sarah, and it was a disaster. **Moses** murdered an **Egyptian** to address a perceived injustice, and that, too, may have delayed the plan of God for at least 40 years into the future. God clearly worked through all of Moses' actions to bring about His good purpose for His people, but we cannot argue that the ends justified the means. We can only say that God can redeem and does redeem even our foolish attempts to cut corners with His will and purposes.

***Tentative Conclusion #2: In waiting for the purposes of God to be fulfilled, we must learn to deal with the brute reality of waiting, with suffering, with apparent silence, and with the temptation to devise our own ingenious strategies to bring about God's will, even if it means cutting corners. Then, when God gives us a word of direction, it may seem ... crazy, but it is ultimately right and best.***

## **II. Tentative Conclusion #3: God's Implausible Will.**

God's will does not always seem plausible from our vantage point, does it? Take these examples into consideration.

**1. Back to Moses.** There is a lot to learn from Moses, the deliverer of Israel. By the time the LORD was ready to use Moses to lead His people out of slavery into The Promised Land, Moses seemed like a middle-aged, washed-up has-been. In 40 years, he had probably given up the idea that God could do anything significant with his life. He had effectively lost all the skills and connections that came with his royal upbringing. He was nothing but ... a shepherd (and we have explored what that might still have meant in his time, taking our cue from Genesis 46:33-34). Yet, 1 burning bush and 10 plagues later, he was standing in front of the Red Sea with the Staff of God in his hand, watching in wonder as the waters stepped aside and let the people of Israel pass through on dry land (See Exodus 14).

**2. Joshua Inherits the Staff.** When the conquest of the Land of Promise was finally beginning, Joshua was commanded by God to take the fortified border city of Jericho in a most unconventional manner: March around the city 6 times doing nothing else, and on the seventh time around blow some ram's horns and give the battle cry. Then press the attack. They did just that. Right after the battle cry was raised, the city walls collapsed, probably to everyone's amazement, and the warriors of Israel invaded the city and put it to the sword (see Joshua 6). There are other narratives in the chapters that followed, that read like keen military strategy. Not that one. No doubt, 7 days of marching around the city would have heightened the tension in the air. But no one anticipated the city walls collapsing right after they raised the battle cry. But they did. This confirmed to Israel that the LORD was with them—*ahead* of them, actually—and that He would give them the power to do what He had commanded them to do. This is a good lesson for us, isn't it?

**3. The Man Called Laughter.** We have already explored the tale of Abraham and Sarah in some detail. By the time Isaac was born, laughter was in the air. The year before his birth, angels visited Abraham and told him that his wait for a biological child with Sarah was finally over. It would happen the next year. As Sarah overheard this conversation, eavesdropping from the family tent, she "laughed to herself, thinking, 'After I am worn out will I have pleasure, especially when my husband is old too?'" (Genesis 18:12, NET). Then the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh?" at this? "Is anything impossible for the LORD?" (Genesis 18:13, NET). Then, the LORD confronted Sarah about this, and she said, "I did not laugh." But the LORD said, "No! You did" (See Genesis 18:15, NET). FYI, probably not a great idea to get into a "did-not-did-too" thing with the

Almighty. One year later, Isaac was born. Isaac means something like “He laughs.” That seems like the only appropriate name to give to the boy. Even Sarah said, “God has made me laugh. Everyone who hears about this will laugh with me” (Genesis 21:6, NET). In the providence of God, a cynical laugh (“No, I didn’t laugh!”) was turned into a joyful, daily reminder of loving purpose as little Laughter smiled up at his *Ima* and later ran about the tent.

**4. Watching for Messiah.** The time-lapse between the last Old-Covenant promises of the coming of the Messiah and the world-altering claim that the Messiah has come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth gives us pause, if we are trying to expedite the fulfillment of God’s purposes in the world. *Chronos* did finally give way to *kairos*, but it took a long, dang time. When Jesus came, He was born to a peasant woman after a virginal conception, and then He was brought up in the outback. **The announcement to the Shepherds** (recounted in Luke 2), is a most amazing feature of the story, since shepherds at that time were considered second-class people. According to contemporary records, they were not even eligible to enter the temple because they could not verify that they were ritually clean; and that in addition to this, their testimony was not allowed in a court of law. You just couldn’t trust those shepherds, they thought. Yet, God sent His angel to *them* to announce Jesus’ birth, and the angel sent them to do the same. Who would have ever thought this would happen?

And then, **Nazareth**, the town where Jesus was brought up, was not exactly a cultural center in the first Christian century. When Phillip, one of the first disciples of Jesus, ran to tell a friend named Nathanael about Jesus, this is how that conversation took shape (**John 1:45-46**, ESV): “Philip found Nathanel and said to him, ‘We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’” And note Nathanael’s response. He missed the part about “Moses and the Prophets” and latched right on to ... Nazareth. Nathanael said to him, ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’” Nazareth was Hicksville, a backwater town with a bad reputation. It was not until Nathanael met Jesus for himself that he was convinced that Jesus was the Messiah. And everyone knew that Jesus did not have the educational or social credentials to hold such an important position in God’s Big Plan, much less even to serve as a rabbi. The people of His hometown turned violent when he came to speak in their synagogue. First, they questioned His family heritage. “Is this not Joseph’s son?” they asked (**Luke 4:22**, ESV). They could not believe that such “gracious words” were coming from this son of a carpenter. Then, after he affirmed that God had extended His grace and help even to *the Gentiles* in the past, their tune turned even darker. “When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, he went away” (Luke 4:28-30, ESV). **“No prophet is acceptable in his hometown,” Jesus had just said (Luke 4:24, ESV).** That was an understatement. What the people of Jesus’ time had come to expect was a conquering General, and what they got, at first, was a humble itinerant rabbi with questionable credentials—well, with the exceptions of being able to heal the sick, raise the dead, exorcise demons, forgive sinners, and teach with powerful authority. Other than that, no one could possibly believe He was the Messiah.

<b>A—God’s will may seem implausible, but if we have good evidence that it is genuinely from God, we can trust Him to bring it about.</b>
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**I—Meanwhile in Narnia.** In the children’s book *The Silver Chair*, written by C. S. Lewis in the Chronicles of Narnia series, 2 children are sent on a quest to find a bewitched prince who is destined to become the king of Narnia. No one knew what had become of that young prince, and he had not been seen by anyone for a long time. The 2 English children, Eustace Scrubb and Jill Pole, were summoned to Narnia by Aslan, The Great Lion, to seek and return the prince to his father’s house. They were to persevere until either they were successful in that mission, or they returned to their own world, or they died trying (yes, that was one possible outcome mentioned by Aslan). Aslan gave Jill 3 signs by which they would know they were on the right track. He told them to her and had

her repeat them over and over until she had them exactly word-perfect and in the right order. He stressed how important they were: “But, first, remember, remember, remember the signs. Say them to yourself when you wake in the morning and when you lie down at night, and when you wake in the middle of the night. And whatever strange things may happen to you, let nothing turn your mind from following the signs.”<sup>1</sup> He said that the signs would look differently in Narnia than they did in the place where he gave them. They must not forget them. They would mean everything for the success of the mission. And they did.

Lewis was onto something universal in that story. The Christian life is a matter of following the ancient paths laid down by our Lord Jesus Christ. To follow *Him* means to *follow* Him. We should be learning from our Lord directly through meditation on the Gospels and learning from His Apostles through meditation on the rest of the New Testament. We must read and contemplate the Old Testament in view of its fulfillment in Jesus the Christ. We must “let nothing turn [our] mind[s] from following the signs”! The way of Jesus looks strange in every human generation and in each epoch of history. And no matter what might be claimed by people in any given generation who purport to be Jesus’ latest spokespeople, He is not adapting His Way in a fashion that will contradict the essentials of “the faith that was once for all entrusted to God’s holy people” (Jude 3, NIV). Since we are not hearing something new and different from God (and what more can God say than what He has said through His Son?<sup>2</sup>), then our calling is to keep reminding ourselves and each other of what He has already spoken to us, and to seek to follow it faithfully (cf. 2 Peter 1:12-15). This leads to our third tentative conclusion.

***Tentative Conclusion #3: By the time God’s promises are fulfilled, they may look differently than what we imagined, or they may seem impossible—to everyone but God.***

Take it home (applications).

- I. We must meditate on the Scriptures to understand the ways of God for human lives.**
- II. We must remember that God will fulfill His purposes in His world in His way in His time.**
- III. We must cling to His promises and be His faithful people as He works in us and in His world to bring about His purposes.**

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<sup>1</sup> See note 1.

<sup>2</sup> I take this question from a commentary written by Ray Stedman on the book of Hebrews.