

Our Great Inheritance

(taken from a sermon by John Piper)

What is the inheritance promised in Romans 8:17? As you face the pleasures and the pains of what remains of your life here on earth, what are you hoping for beyond all this? Do you have a hope beyond this life that makes the present pleasures look smaller than the present pains look manageable? This is what Paul had. He wants us to have it. You see it in verse 18: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us." Paul wants us to share this tremendous hope: the inheritance on the way to us is so great that it makes every trouble in life seem small by comparison. What is this inheritance?

There are at least three aspects to the inheritance.

1. The World

First, the inheritance is the world. **Romans 4:13**, "The promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be *heir of the world* was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith." In other words, if you share the faith of Abraham, then you are a fellow heir with him, and the inheritance, Paul said, is "the world."

If you are an heir of God, then you will inherit what is God's. And God owns the world. **Psalm 24:1** "The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it." So if the earth is the Lord's and everything in it, then the heirs of the Lord will inherit the earth and everything in it. In **Psalm 2:8** God says to his Son, "Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession." And if we are fellow heirs with the Son, then we shall inherit the nations.

Paul puts it this way in **1 Corinthians 3:21-23**, "For all things belong to you, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God." What is our inheritance? The world. The earth and all that is in it. The nations. All things.

But practically what does that mean? At least it means this: that everything that exists will serve your happiness. Nothing will have the final prerogative of trumping your joy. "All things are yours" means that even the negative things – Paul mentions life *and death* in **1 Corinthians 3:22** – will serve you in the end. In the end God does not merely defeat every enemy of your good, but turns enemies into servants. "Tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword" – we don't just conquer, we "*more than conquer*" (**Romans 8:35-37**). All things are yours – life and death – all things are yours. All things will serve your everlasting joy.

2. God Himself

Second, the inheritance is not only the world, but God himself. In fact, if we said that our

great inheritance was mainly the things God had made, and not God himself, we would be idolaters. Consider **Romans 5:2b**: "We exult in hope of the glory of God." In other words, the great joy of our hope is that one day we will see and savor the glory of God himself. And lest you think that his glory is something different from God himself, consider verse 11 of that same chapter, "And not only this, but we also exult *in God* through our Lord Jesus Christ." "In God!" Not the gifts of God. And not in this verse even in the glory of God, but in God.

The great high hope of the Christian church is described in **Revelation 21:3** like this: "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God." This was the capstone of the hope of the Old Testament saints, even though they had strong hopes for a land of their own. **Psalm 73:25-26**, "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."

This is our great inheritance: the Lord himself! O how we need to cultivate a great taste for him and his fellowship. If he is not precious to you, what a stranger you are to your inheritance! If you love his gifts, think on how wonderful the giver must be. And think what an insult it is to take a gift from someone's hand and delight in it more than you delight in the giver. God himself is our portion. We were made for him. And all the good things that he has made for us are meant to reveal more of him and send our hearts singing to God (**1 Timothy 4:1-5**).

3. Redeemed and Glorified Bodies

Third, there is one more aspect of our inheritance found in the following verses in Romans 8, namely, redeemed and glorified bodies. The reason this is so crucial is that if we are to enjoy the world and all that is in it, and if all these good things are not to compete with God and become idols, then we must have bodies capable of deeper, higher, fuller joys than we presently have. And we must be rid of all the pain and crying and tears of this world. So **Romans 8:22-23** says, "For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."

This is a key part of what it means in **Romans 8:17** to be glorified. We will share in the glory of God in the sense that we are enough like him (conformed to the image of his Son, **Romans 8:29**) to enjoy him and all his gifts the way he does. It will all be from him and through him and to him, and our joy will be full and his glory will be unmistakably central.

So our inheritance as children of God includes at least this: the world and all that is in it; God himself as our final and ultimate portion and reward; and new, glorified bodies that can enjoy more fully and deeply God and his gifts with no hint of idolatry.