

March 26, 2017

Letter to Me

READ: Romans 8:18 (Common English Bible)

“I believe that the present suffering is nothing compared to the coming glory that is going to be revealed to us.”

MEDITATE:

In his country track, *Letter to Me*, Brad Paisley imagines writing a letter to his 17-year-old self. Here he reflects on the people and moments that have formed and shaped him to be the man he has now become. More importantly, Paisley shares with his teenage self what he has learned over the years and that the present pain of a broken romance is nothing compared to what will be revealed to him in the future: “You got so much ahead. You’ll make new friends. You should see your kids and wife. And I’d end by saying have no fear. These are nowhere near the best years of your life.” No one who listens carefully to these lyrics will challenge that they resonate deeply with all who have wrestled with failed relationships during the teenage and young adult years, “But I know at seventeen, it’s hard to see past Friday night.” Yet, Paisley concludes his letter with the encouragement, “I wish you wouldn’t worry, let it be. I’d say, have a little faith and you’ll see.”

The Christian believers in Rome are feeling like a 17-year-old boy and the apostle Paul has written a letter – a letter urging them that they have a little faith. As is true for many believers, those Christians in Rome have mistakenly shared in the assumption that they should be free from pain and should be guaranteed pleasantness. But this is not their experience. Neither does scripture ever make the promise that belief results in a flight from reality. The reality of this broken world is that we will experience broken relationships, disappointment and pain. Those are the moments when, “It’s hard to see past Friday night.” Paul asks that they – and we – take a longer view. Though, in the present moment, we may groan together, Paul urges that we also anticipate together; anticipate that God isn’t finished with this world or with us. There is a “coming glory that is going to be revealed to us.”

This word from Paul reverses our faith expectations and directs a new path for our walk with Jesus Christ. The Christian now has the opportunity to view suffering not as a “misfortune that has selected us” or as a punishment for some personal failing. All of creation suffers from brokenness and the believer in Jesus is invited to live in the very midst of that brokenness in the confident assurance that God still shows-up for work each day and continues the work of restoration and wholeness. The completion of that restoration lies in the future and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is but a glimpse of God’s capacity to complete that work. With Paul’s characteristic proclivity for understatement, he tells us that our present suffering pales in comparison to what God has for us in the future.

When we are around the age of 17, heartbreak seems like the end of the world. We simply can’t think past that week. The present moment is the most important moment of our life. When we get a bit older we realize how ridiculous we were to feel that way, particularly at such a young age. We grasp reality a little better and discover that we did, in fact, survive that difficult age. And we will survive the next heartbreak as well because we know that better things also come our way. The apostle Paul has written a letter. He wants us to know, as Brad Paisley sings, “And oh, you got so much going for you, going right.” What we have going for us; what we have going right is God. Our lives and future are held securely in God’s grasp.

APPLY:

1. How has this scripture or meditation spoken to you?

2. What insight can you apply to your life this week?

3. What one specific act do you intend to take, an attitude to change, a person to see, or prayer to pray?

PRAY:

You never abandon me, O God, but too often I am afraid. Empty my heart of fear and doubt. Fill me once again with the confidence that my future belongs to you. Amen.