

Romans 8:18-25

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[0 : 00] Take out your copy of God's Word, which I hope you have with you today, and turn to the book of Romans, chapter 8. I'll tell you it's a blessing to be here with you today.

My wife is not, and she wanted me to share her grief with you that she couldn't be here. Our oldest son is sick once again as our house continues to be plagued with illness, and so I ask for your continued prayers for them and for her.

She really, really misses the church. I'm thankful I can be here kind of to stand in her place and represent the family and to preach to you this morning. Let's open together in a word of prayer, and we'll dive in together.

Father God, it is a blessing this morning to meet with your church, your church that was purchased by the life, the work, the death, the resurrection.

The ascension of Jesus Christ. And thank you, Father, for these people who have the Spirit of God abiding in them. We might come together and join as one to sing praises to your name, to study your inspired scripture.

[1 : 16] And truly, God, we need you in this hour. Father, the understanding of your word is as much of a miracle as the inspiration of it.

And Father, we cry to you this morning that we might see clearly the truths you would have for us this day, that you would speak individually into our lives, that we might know you more and exalt you more as a result.

Amen. We pray this in the precious name of Christ. Amen. And we have come in our study together of the book of Romans to chapter 8, which is the great climactic chapter of the book of Romans. It doesn't mean any of it's less important, but I believe that the most precious of the truths are found in chapter 8. And lest we forget where we've been, I kind of want to run through quickly the rest of the book for you to lay a foundation for us to build upon.

In chapter 1, the first 17 verses, Paul gives his greeting and then his abbreviated, his simplistic presentation of the gospel to us there in verses 16 and 17.

[2 : 28] And then he begins beyond that to talk about humanity's great need of the gospel, that no one, Jew or Greek, is exempt from the curse that Adam and Eve bought for us in the original sin.

And that there is nothing anyone can do on their own to gain salvation. We are all in a desperate state. We all need salvation.

In the beginning in chapter 3, verse 21, he begins to greater develop the gospel of Jesus Christ for us, to have us see that Jesus Christ stood in the place of the church, bore the wrath of God that we had purchased for ourselves on our behalf.

And that if we place our faith in Jesus Christ, in His person and in His work, that we'll be saved. And He develops that for us through the end of chapter 5, verse 21.

That helps me. 321 to 521 is His clear gospel presentation for us. And then chapters 6 and 7, He gives to us the negative benefits of the gospel.

[3 : 40] Now, by that I don't mean the bad benefits, of course, but the negative voice benefits of the gospel. The things that no longer exist because of the gospel.

That we are now no longer slaves of sin. We're not held captive to the power of sin anymore. That we have, the body of sin has been brought to nothing.

That believers have died to the law. You hear the negative voice in that. In chapter 8, we come to the positive effects. And He teaches us about the ministry of the Spirit of God in our lives.

The indwelling Spirit that we all have. Those things are, the ministries of the Spirit, are our sanctification and our security. Chapter 8, verse 2, He says, The law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

And the Spirit of God is about that work, continually moving us toward perfection in Christ. In chapter 8, verse 14, He says, All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

[4 : 48] So the Spirit is a seal for those who have placed their faith in Christ. That we are secure, that we are held securely in the hands of Christ. And that we will, in fact, finish this process of sanctification.

So those are the two ministries of the Spirit of God. But in verse 17, He introduces a new concept for the book of Romans.

And that's the concept of suffering. So, in verse 17, He says, And if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him, in order that we also may be glorified with Him.

And Paul was certainly a man who was familiar with suffering. Turn quickly. I want you to put your little ribbon or your finger here.

Turn quickly with me to 2 Corinthians chapter 11. I want you to see that this is not a concept foreign to Paul that he's going to write about.

[5 : 51] 2 Corinthians chapter 11, verse 25. Paul writes, Paul knew what it was to suffer.

Any careful reader of Scripture, as I'm sure all of you are astute Bible scholars, also know that it's not a foreign concept to the pages of Scripture. Jesus talked about suffering in Luke 9, 23.

He said, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, which is a place people died daily, and follow me. Paul again wrote of suffering in 2 Timothy 3, 12.

He said, Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. The author of Hebrews said it, in Hebrews chapter 12, verses 6 and 7.

For the Lord disciplines the one He loves and chastises every son whom He receives. It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

[7 : 26] Peter talked about it in 1 Peter 4, 13. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed. So, what is meant of suffering?

What type of suffering are we talking about? And I believe there's a great spectrum of suffering for the Christian. It certainly includes persecution, physical, imprisonment, martyrdom.

It includes those things without a doubt. Suffering for the sake of Christ does. But I think it also includes other things. I think anything that we experience on the path to righteousness, in the process of sanctification, in this world that is unpleasant for us as believers, is suffering.

I have a head cold today. My head cold is a result of the curse of sin in this world. If I sound nasally to you, my head feels worse than I sound now, I'm sure.

That is suffering. Young people feeling strange on a college campus, where everyone parties and does what they want, they seek their perceived greatest joy and momentary pleasure, and you feel odd and out of place, is suffering.

[8 : 47] You may get made fun of for being a goody two-shoes, or a holier-than-thou. Certainly qualifies as suffering. So all of us, in some way, if we are in Christ, experience this discomfort in this world.

We long for something greater. So this morning is not just for those of you who are going overseas, where you may possibly experience persecution.

It's for all of us this morning. Let's read together verses 18-25, which is our text for today. Paul continues his discourse, verse 18, For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

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 attain 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. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who are the first fruits of the Spirit, grown inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

[10 : 07] For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

So not only does he give to us this new concept in Romans of suffering, but at the same time, he begins to speak to us about future glory.

So he talks to us about a hope that transcends suffering, a hope that comes in above suffering, a hope that is greater than suffering, that puts suffering in its proper place.

And that hope is hope in future glory. Look at it in the text. Verse 18, he speaks of the glory that is to be revealed to us. Verse 19, he speaks of the revealing of the sons of God.

And verse 21, the freedom of the glory of the children of God. Verse 23, we wait eagerly for adoption of sons, the redemption of our bodies.

[11 : 15] And in verse 25, we're waiting for it, the glory that is to be revealed to us with patience. The glory that is coming puts in proper place the suffering we experience now.

So what is meant by that, this glory that is to be revealed to us? He speaks of the redemption of our bodies, it is the shedding of all the weight of sin in this world.

It is restoring us to our Adamic nature, putting us back in the place we were created to be. As Adam and Eve were created, had perfect union with God, lived in an environment that was totally unspoiled by the curse of sin, that is the place we're advancing back to as believers in Christ.

It's an exalted state. Daniel 12, 3 speaks of it. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above. And those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars, forever and ever.

Matthew 13, 43, Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father. He who has ears, let him hear. We are working our way back to perfection.

[12 : 34] That's what it means to be glorified. If you have ever felt the weight of sin in your life, and I pray that you have, you will revel in this truth that one day, no longer will you have to battle with sin.

You will be perfect and complete in Christ. That is the hope that transcends suffering. But he elaborates a little bit to help us understand this.

And he speaks of the creation, beginning in verse 19, What does he mean by the creation?

I think it's important that we understand that properly and get what he's talking about. Certainly all things besides God are created. I don't believe he's speaking of all things.

I don't think he's talking about angels or demons, because we see that the creation was subjected in hope. And angels and demons don't need hope.

[13 : 41] Well, I shouldn't say it that way. Angels don't need hope. They are already perfect and holy and abide with God. Demons need hope. They're just never going to get it. Their eternal state, both angels and demons, has already been fixed.

So I don't think he's talking about angels or demons. Is he talking about the lost, the unbeliever? I would say to you, no. Because he says that the creation was subjected to futility.

Not willingly, but because of him who subjected it. That's verse 20. The lost willingly subject themselves to futility. The lost willingly feed their flesh and sin against God.

So he's not speaking about those who are unbelievers, the lost. He's speaking about those who are saved then? No. Because later he actually compares us to the creation, doesn't he?

Verse 23, And not only the creation, but we ourselves, writing this book to Christians, have the first fruits of the Spirit. So he's not speaking about Christians. He's speaking of all things visible, inanimate and animate.

[14 : 57] He's personifying nature for us when he speaks of the creation. It's nature personified. They have been subjected.

By whom? Let's look at the text there. For the creation was subjected to futility. Futility. The word futility here means devoid of appropriateness.

Frail, wanting in vigor. The creation is not as it was intended to be. And it was subjected by God. It was part of the curse.

Genesis chapter 3. The nature itself was cursed. Sin ushered in death, not just for humanity, but for nature itself. Look at spring.

It's kind of a reminder of this as you go throughout your year. Every year, we're currently in spring. Nature puts on this great show, this big effort to live, to grow high, to compete for resources.

[15 : 58] You have the clearing in the forest with the pine trees. They pop up first trying to grab some of that sunlight before they get shaded out. But every year, summer comes, fall comes, the leaves wither, things go back into dormancy, things die.

It has been subjected. It does not have the vigor that it was meant to have. And it's because of our sin. Isaiah 24, 4-7 reads, The wine mourns, the vine languishes, all the merry-hearted sigh.

So because of sin, the earth itself groans. You see the language there? Groans in expectation of the coming glory. I read to you a number of weeks ago an excerpt a little bit longer than I'm going to read to you today from the great sermon, Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God by Jonathan Edwards.

Part of that sermon was based off of this section of Scripture that we're reading today. So I just want to read this to you again. And the point he's making, just so you don't get all lost in his language, is that the earth doesn't willingly even bear us, the ones who ushered the curse into the world.

The earth would gladly get rid of us, quit serving us so that we might sin against God. So listen carefully to this. Were it not for the sovereign pleasure of God, the earth would not bear you one moment, for you are a burden to it.

[17:55] The creation groans with you. The creation is made subject to the bondage of your corruption, not willingly. The sun does not willingly shine upon you to give you light to serve sin and Satan. The earth does not willingly yield her increase to satisfy your lusts, nor is it willingly a stage for your wickedness to be acted upon.

The earth does not willingly serve you for breath to maintain the flame of life in your vitals while you spend your life in the service of God's enemies. You catch all that? The earth doesn't even want us to breathe because we're enemies of God.

God's creatures are good and were made for men to serve God with and do not willingly subserve to any other purpose and groan when they are abused to purposes so directly contrary to their nature and end.

And the world would spew you out were it not for the sovereign hand of him who had subjected it in hope. So we see this eager longing of nature, this groaning with him.

And that's a recurring word that we see in the text here. We see it of nature. We see it of ourselves as Christians. And then in the coming weeks, verse 26, we'll see that the Spirit groans as well.

[19:05] And we'll get there next week, Lord willing. Groans within us. Isaiah 65, 17 says, For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind.

And that's what we groan for as we suffer here. Like the creation. There's a phrase I want you to see in verse 19.

That phrase is, Waits with eager longing. The creation waits with eager longing. And it's a very similar Greek phrase to verse 25, speaking of Christians, that we wait for it with patience.

And it means, literally, to watch from the head. So that's interesting. So you have to pull that out a little bit more, look at other places it's used in Greek literature, to see that it means to watch with neck outstretched.

So the picture of it is a looking for something. Like as if you're on your tippy toes. To look out in expectation of the glory that's coming. That's the picture we're getting.

[20:14] The personification of nature is that nature groans because it's been subjected to futility. It's weak in vigor. And it's waiting expectantly for the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

This earth is in a downward spiral. There are some who think, macro-revolutionists, that we're increasingly getting better.

We're not. We're not. This earth one day will be destroyed and a new one will be created. Praise God. If you have any doubt of that, you have to cut your grass every single week right now.

And if you don't weed your garden, the weeds will absolutely take over. Chaos reigns in the world we live in. Our house right now is being attacked by, I believe what are called sugar ants.

They're everywhere. This morning as I was looking over my notes, I kept going. And on my desk, there's no food on my desk. What are they doing? Chaos reigns in this world and it's spiraling downward toward ultimate destruction.

[21:27] And so he uses some interesting language even as the nature goes through this groaning and he speaks of childbirth. Verse 22 he says, We know the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

Isn't that interesting language? I've never given birth to a child. I don't actually know what that feels like. I'm told that it's absolutely horrible. Sam, my wife, has three levels of pain I've learned over the past six years.

If I hear her exclaim from the kitchen, and she's done something in the kitchen and she outwardly speaks of it, it's really not that serious. I've learned that.

For the first couple of years, I would throw, drop, whatever I was doing and rush to the kitchen. I've learned that it's really not that big a deal. I still go check on her. She's usually burnt herself a little bit or minor cut.

Not a huge deal. That's the first level of pain for my wife. If my wife jokes about pain, she's at another level. So I took Sam to Tallulah Gorge before we got married and we were down in the gorge and hiking around and she tried to hop across a rock and she slipped and she hit her tailbone.

[22 : 44] And she hopped up and laughed it off like, no big deal. That was really spazzy, but I'm good. And I was told that it turned her backside all kinds of colors.

And she was in a lot of pain for weeks. So Sam has a second level of pain that's worse than the expressive, I'm in a lot of pain level where she jokes it off and laughs about it.

When Sam went into labor with our first son, I learned that my wife has a third level of pain, which is silence. And when she says nothing, she is in a whole nother place.

And I, knowing that, in my knowledge, her highest level of pain was a joking level. I tried to joke with her a lot and I was not funny at all to her.

So I know that that has been a unique experience for her and a whole nother level of pain. So why does he talk about the earth groaning in the pains of childbirth?

[23 : 44] And it's because there's something glorious and wonderful to rejoice in at the end of that process. It's very difficult for a man.

Ladies, I know that labor is the worst for you. It's very difficult for a man to stand by and watch his wife suffer in that way. It's so hard because you want to do something to help.

And I mean, just like massaging feet and shoulders just doesn't quite do it. You want to take the pain away. But you go through that because you know at the end of that process, a baby will be born.

You'll hold your son or your daughter in your hands and so it makes the pain worth it. How many crazy ladies do you know that go through this horrific experience of giving birth and like that day they go, I want another baby.

My wife did it. And my thought was, are you kidding me? Have you lost your mind? I just watched. I was so horrible. But it was worth it in the end.

[24 : 41] Right? It was worth it in the end. And that's why creation is personified in this way because the suffering is worth the glory to be revealed. You know what Paul, all the suffering that Paul endured and he says to us in verse 18, I consider the sufferings of this present time are not even worth comparing.

There's no point in even setting it on the scale together. It'd be pointless with the glory that is to be revealed. It's going to be that much better. It's worth enduring.

2 Corinthians 5, 4 and 5, he wrote, For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened, not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. And there's that ministry again of the Spirit of Christ dwelling within us, giving us a deposit on what is to come.

So we certainly enjoy this life because of God. We certainly get taste, glimpses of heaven because we've been brought back into union with Him.

[26 : 00] But it is still just a glimpse of what's to come. It's good now. If you've experienced the goodness of God, it's so good now. It's going to be so much better.

Infinitely better, in fact. And so, we have a hope and it's a hope that we don't see. We don't experience it in full now.

It's not that we've been to heaven and come back and said, that was a cool place. I'm looking forward to getting back there. We haven't actually seen it in full experience, but we know it's coming. We get glimpses of it and we long for it.

He says that, for in this hope we were saved. Now, hope that is seen is not hope for who hopes for what he sees. If we had this already, it wouldn't be hope at all. But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

And that then is the hope that transcends our suffering. That allows us to bear up underneath it.
[27 : 04] There is nothing in this world that can touch your joy in Christ. Because this, it's so good. You have been bought.

You belong to the Most High God. And one day, as we progress through this life, as we progress in this process of sanctification, this perfecting, one day, we will be perfect, glorified, done with this world, living in everlasting joy with him.

Suffering in this world isn't even worth comparing with that. Let's bear up together in it. Let's look like this as we suffer. Waiting for the coming glory.

I think most of us look like this. Waiting for the coming glory. Oh God. And I believe that's what the world sees the church doing.

And as we do that, we look to the same comforts that the world looks to. And we have such a great comfort, a coming joy that's going to be everlasting.

[28 : 10] If you've been here much at all, you've heard this John Newton quote, but it's so perfect. I have to read it to you again. He said, suppose a man was going to New York to take possession of a large estate and his carriage should break down one mile before he got to the city, which obliged him to walk the rest of the way to the inheritance.

He's got a massive inheritance waiting for him and he's almost there and his carriage breaks down and he can't get there except for walking. What a fool we should think him if we saw him wringing his hands and blubbing out all the remaining mile.

My carriage is broken. My carriage is broken. He wouldn't care. He wouldn't give a rip about the carriage, would he? Because his inheritance will buy him as many carriages as if he could ever have.

He'd gladly hop out of it, leave it behind in his mind, and press on to the goal. What a great joy we have in Christ now and what a greater joy we will have in him one day.

So let us together as a church bear up under suffering in light of the hope of future glory. Let's pray together.