

## Groaning for Glory

Romans 8:18-25

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*“<sup>18</sup> For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope<sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.” – Romans 8:18-25, ESV*

Waiting is agony sometimes. This past week, we watched *Gifted Hands*, the story of Ben Carson, the world-renowned Johns Hopkins pediatric neurosurgeon. The movie is framed around Dr. Carson’s most famous surgery – the separation of conjoined twins fused at the cranium. The surgery, performed in 1987, involved a team of 70 and took 22 hours to perform. The parents of these twins waited for 22 hours to see if both of their babies would survive in an operation that had never been successful before. I’m sure that waiting for them was agony.

Paul tells us in this section of Romans 8 that we believers, along with creation, are all waiting, and while we are waiting, we are groaning.

### I. Suffering vs. Glory: No Comparison?

Paul has just told us that if we suffer with Christ, we will also be glorified with Him. This is a conditional promise of God (“**If** you suffer **then** you will be glorified.”) which can immediately prompt a negative reaction from us. After all, we don’t want to suffer. Personally, I hate going to the dentist, even though I know that the suffering in the dental chair is short-lived and the benefits are real and lasting.

It is certainly true that we must suffer with Christ in this present world and in our present state, if we truly belong to Him. Paul took this seriously and thought about it very personally, as evidenced in Philippians 3:8-11 –

*For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— <sup>10</sup> that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings,*

*becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*

It's not so much that Paul was eager to share in the sufferings of Christ, but he wanted to gain Christ, to know Christ, and to attain to the resurrection of the dead, to glory. Paul was willing to endure suffering for the sake of the knowing Christ better and being like Christ in the end. If sharing in the sufferings of Christ – the suffering of enduring temptation and persecution – means that we can know Christ better in this life- as He walks with us through the suffering- and that we can be made fully like Him in our resurrection, then the suffering is worth it.

How can we measure such suffering and know whether it is worth it or not?

Well, here in Romans 8:18, Paul is measuring all of the suffering of this present time – not only suffering for Christ and with Christ in temptation and persecution, but ALL suffering – and says it is not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

When Paul says this, he opens verse 18 with an accounting term, which was used of ancient bookkeeping. He says that if you were to take all of the suffering of this present time and put them in the liabilities column and then put the glory to be revealed in the assets category, the suffering of this present time would be so small, so insignificant by contrast, that it would not be worthy- not be suitable or fit- for comparison.

Think about it: Let's say you're struggling under an immense weight of debt. You make \$50,000 per year and you have over \$100,000 in unsecured debt – student loans, credit cards, a personal loan, etc. This is a crushing load of debt and it would likely weigh very heavily on your mind. But now suppose that you're due an inheritance of \$100 million. Now how does the weight of that debt feel?

The sufferings of this present age can seem immense, intense and unbearable. Paul is not minimizing or dismissing the sufferings we endure. In 2 Cor. 11:24-28, Paul recounts some of his own sufferings for Christ:

*Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. <sup>25</sup> Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; <sup>26</sup> on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; <sup>27</sup> in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. <sup>28</sup> And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.*

The Jews limited lashes to 39 partly because exceeding 40 lashes would likely kill a man. Beaten with rods? Stoned? When Paul was stoned, he was left for dead.

Yet earlier in 2 Corinthians 4, Paul said,

*So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, <sup>18</sup> as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*

Paul was able to refer to all of his sufferings as “light momentary affliction,” not because he was minimizing them but because he looked at them in the light of eternity.

Paul says all of our sufferings are not worthy of being compared, not even deserving of a side-by-side contrast with “the glory that is to be revealed to us.” The little word translated “to” here carries with it the sense of “unto” or even “in.” The glory is to be revealed unto us, as a gift, or in us, as a reality which will be seen in us.

I do think, given the context of what is going to be said, that “in” is the better translation, which is how the NIV and the KJV and the NKJV all translate it. But it’s not that important because the main point is clear: The coming glory is so much bigger and better and longer-lasting that nothing we could ever suffer in this life is worth comparing to it.

Remember my earlier example about the \$100,000 in debts. Well you *could* compare that to a \$100 million inheritance. It’s 1%. But even if you had \$100 million in debts, they couldn’t be compared to an infinite inheritance. So also any period of suffering- even if it lasted, unabated, for 100 years- cannot be compared to eternity, perfect bliss stretching forever.

## **II. Groaning Creation**

We’re not the only ones who suffer. Verses 19-22 tell us of the longing and groaning of creation, which also suffers:

*For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope<sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.*

Creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. This is the verse that makes me prefer the translation “the glory to be revealed **in** us.” Creation is waiting for the same thing we are waiting for – for us to be glorified.

Think about it: Creation itself is waiting with eager longing. Paul uses an interesting image here of creation having an outstretched head as it eagerly awaits. It’s literally “*For the outstretched head of creation is eagerly waiting for the revealing of the sons of God.*”

And why would creation be so eager to see the revealing of the sons of God? Because our full and public revelation as the sons of God will be creation’s full and final redemption.

We are children of God, having been adopted by the Spirit. But the world doesn’t know that or see that. The world doesn’t take notice or care. John puts it like this in 1 John 3:1-2 –

*“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. <sup>2</sup> Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared . . .”*

So the world does not know us or even care to know us as children of God because it does not know our heavenly Father. But the creation – that is, the natural world – is standing on tip-toes, as it were, waiting for the time when we will be revealed and creation itself will be liberated from bondage.

This is a powerful and striking image: Creation itself has been subjected to futility and bondage and creation itself will be set free. Think about the natural world: How is it in bondage? How it is enslaved to futility?

I think it’s in bondage to futility in three ways:

1. Creation itself does not work as it’s supposed to.
2. Creation is ruled over by fallen humanity, which abuses and exploits nature instead of caring for it.
3. Creation was designed to give God glory, to reveal His handiwork, but sinful man ignores and suppresses what creation reveals.

I remember watching a nature show in college and getting very upset at hyenas as they worked in a pack to steal cubs from a mother lion. The mother lion was far more powerful than the hyenas, but they were able to work together and steal all of her children. It was frustrating and heart-breaking to watch. You do know that God’s original and ultimate design for His creation doesn’t involve that kind of savage behavior, right?

Earlier this week, we were watching a show about kangaroo kick-boxing, which may sound pretty cool but can actually be very brutal. Two male kangaroos will fight savagely with each other, sometimes for hours, over the right to mate with a female. This isn't right, either.

Darwinism would just say that both of these examples are perfectly normal examples of natural selection, of the survival of the fittest. But the Bible tells us that this is not God's original and ultimate design for His creation. In the beginning, God declared all of His creation to be "very good," and what we know about the character of God from Scripture would not have Him pronouncing savagery as "very good."

As far as God's ultimate design for creation, we can catch a glimpse of it in Isaiah 11:6-9 –

*The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,  
and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,  
and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together;  
and a little child shall lead them.  
7 The cow and the bear shall graze;  
their young shall lie down together;  
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.  
8 The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra,  
and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.  
9 They shall not hurt or destroy  
in all my holy mountain;  
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD  
as the waters cover the sea.*

The creation- which was originally "very good" and will ultimately see the wolf and the lamb, the leopard and the young goat living together in peace- has now been subjected to futility and placed in bondage to corruption. For all the beauty we can still see in God's creation, we can also see so much evidence of this futility and corruption – droughts, devastating hail storms, destructive hurricanes, blight, plagues, pestilence, etc. But it has been subjected in hope . . .

One day, the creation "*itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.*" In the meantime, as creation waits, it groans, "*groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.*" This groaning of creation is intense. Paul uses two terms which could be translated as "moaning and groaning" or "groaning and straining" and is used of the pain of childbirth, which is why Paul says, "*groaning together in the pains of childbirth.*"

Childbirth is a good image for the groaning of creation. Before modern medical care, childbirth for women was extremely painful and dangerous and the pain could last an exceptionally long

time. But most of the time, the pain of childbirth leads to the joy of the baby being born in such a way that the mother immediately forgets the pain of the childbirth in the joy of birth.

### III. Groaning Believers

But creation is not the only one groaning. *“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.”*

We ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, also groan. Paul has talked a lot about the Spirit and His benefits for believers so far in Romans 8:

In verse 2, The Spirit brings life which sets us free from the law of sin and death.

In verses 4-6, the Spirit enables us to live life in a new way, according to a new mindset, empowering us to be able to please God and submit to His law out of love and bringing us true joy and peace.

In verses 9-11, the Spirit lives in us as the Spirit of life, bringing us the benefits of eternal life and the promise of resurrection.

But Paul says that all of these benefits that we receive from the Spirit are just the firstfruits. They are a down-payment, a taste and a guarantee of more to come in the day of redemption, in our resurrection unto glory as the revealed children of God.

A child who has a large inheritance in a trust fund is given an allowance to meet their living expenses while they wait for the day of full maturity, when they receive the trust fund in full.

Sometimes Beth will make cookies or scones or something for a church function or a family gathering and she'll let me taste one. Then, I have to wait for the event to arrive to be able to have any more.

Our life in Christ is this way. We can enjoy much of God's presence. We can enjoy the love of God and eternal life with God even here and now in this present time, full of suffering. But we know it's not the full redemption we've been promised. So we groan, too.

We groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons. We've already been adopted; we have the Spirit of adoption and we are children of God. But the day of our full and open adoption, the day of the redemption of our bodies, has not yet come.

We have a number of friends who have adopted children and have gone through that full process. We have some friends in Georgia who are in the process right now. They know who their little boy is and they have his picture. They've named him Caleb. He's their son, but they're waiting until they can go and get him and bring him home.

God has adopted us as his children. He has sent us His Holy Spirit to live in us as the Spirit of adoption. We are His. He has named us as His children. But still we wait, for Jesus to come and claim us and take us to be with Himself.

*“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. <sup>2</sup> In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.” – John 14:1-3, ESV*

#### **IV. Unseen Hope**

As we groan, we live in hope and wait with patience:

*“For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”*

#### **“In this hope we were saved.”**

What does Paul mean by this? What does it mean to be saved and how are we saved “in hope”?

In Ephesians 2:8-9, Paul says, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”*

So, we have some very important ideas here: Saved by grace through faith in hope, as a gift of God and not as a result of works.

To be saved means to be rescued or delivered from this present evil age, from the curse of sin and death and from the coming judgment of God. It encompasses all of God's saving action on our behalf – forgiveness of sins, adoption as sons, declaration that we are not guilty, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the resurrection of our bodies, eternal life.

And yet, to put it more simply, to be saved is to pass from death into life. It is what Paul says in Romans 8:2, *“For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free from the law of sin and death.”* The natural order of life for human beings is one of sin, guilt, death and eternal condemnation under the justice of God. To be saved is to be cleansed of sin, forgiven of guilt, given eternal life and set free from condemnation forever.

We are saved by God’s grace – by His goodness, kindness and favor, which we don’t deserve and can’t earn.

We are saved through faith. Faith is trust, trusting God and His promises.

We are saved in hope. Hope is the eager expectation of the fulfillment of all of God’s promises.

Faith is present. We are now trusting God and His promise, which He has given us now. Hope is future-oriented. We hope for the fulfillment of all of God’s promises and the full reality of eternal life.

But hope, according to the Bible, is not some wishful thinking. Far from it. Hope is something certain, secure and trustworthy. The Bible describes it as an anchor:

*“ . . . when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, <sup>14</sup> saying, “Surely I will bless you and multiply you.” <sup>15</sup> And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. <sup>16</sup> For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. <sup>17</sup> So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, <sup>18</sup> so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. <sup>19</sup> We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, <sup>20</sup> where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”*  
– Hebrews 6:13-20, ESV

Our hope anchor, sure and steadfast, is nothing more or less than a person – Jesus Christ Himself. He has resurrected from the dead, in a glorious body over which death and its effects no longer have any power. He has ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God, interceding for us as our Great High Priest. He is our living hope. When He is revealed, we will see Him and be made like Him and shall receive the fullness of salvation.

So we are saved “in this hope,” in the hope that is found in Jesus. He is not visible now among us. He does give us promises, some of which are visible, like the Lord’s Supper. We trust His

promises with faith and we're saved in hope. Until He comes again, we wait with patience, even as we groan for glory.