

Romans 8:18-25
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Romans 8:18-25 (NKJV)

18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

19 For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God.

20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected *it* in hope;

21 because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

22 For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.

23 Not only *that*, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

24 For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?

25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for *it* with perseverance.

The Glory to Be Revealed

The news nowadays just isn't good, is it? Pandemics, isolation, economic uncertainties, riots, injustice, and it seems like no one can agree or get along anymore. This country was already highly politically polarized, and now that the ingredients of an election year and pandemic have been thrown in, it's only gotten worse. When I look at the news, social media, what have you, even for just a tiny bit, I feel a host of emotions. I've felt anger, anxiety, fear, exasperation, frustration, just to name a few. Maybe you feel those feelings too. However, I think the emotion I feel the most of all those, at least at some point along the way, is sadness. My heart breaks for this world right now because it's running around without hope. The news paints this virus like it's the end of the world, people's worlds seem like they're ending because of the disease, or because of lost jobs, or because of social isolation, or a host of other things. And my heart breaks for them. My heart breaks for people because people are suffering, in a host of different ways. And then we have today's text. Paul suffered. He was persecuted, imprisoned,

and came close to death more than once due to his faith. He struggled against his sin. He had friends leave him. He had brothers who were being killed for their faith by the government. And while he acknowledges that those things happen, and will continue to happen, he points us away from them and to a hopeful future. In fact, it's the most hopeful future any of us could ever ask for. And he does it with one verse, verse 18. He says that the present sufferings will NOT compare to the glory that will come when Christ returns

The sufferings we experience now aren't even worth comparing, they're not on the same level, when compared to the glory awaiting us. Now there are three important things I want to talk about from this text to help put this into perspective, especially since Paul has laid out a lot of the context leading up to this throughout the book of Romans. First, we're all groaning because of the reality of sin. Second, this groaning is in anticipation of future renewal and redemption promised to us in Christ. And finally, until that day, we persevere in hope in the midst of our present sufferings. So, first things first.

We're all groaning because of sin. The fact that there's suffering, that creation itself is groaning, as the text says, and that we ourselves groan is because of sin. All suffering, all tragedies, all kinds of evil, can be traced back to the reality of sin. Paul said in chapter 5 of this book that because of Adam's sin, death came into the world. All the way back in Genesis 3, when that sin occurred, God cursed all of creation, man and nature alike

Mankind was cursed with a selfish, sinful nature, which manifests itself in the form of pride, selfishness, immorality, bigotry, and a host of other things that Paul lays out for us in Romans 1 and Galatians 5. However, not only was mankind cursed, so was the rest of creation. However, this was not willingly, like in Adam's case, as Paul says here. No, God cursed creation because of us.

You see, creation was designed for us. Back in Eden, the animals, plants, and everything else there was designed for Adam and Eve's benefit. They were in charge of caring for it, and the plants and animals were there as a source of food for them. Creation was to benefit us, and we were supposed to care for it. However, after the Fall, God also cursed the ground. He made it difficult for us to work (farmers especially I think can relate to this. You can blame Adam for all the hard work that you have to do). Death spread from us to the plants and animals and everything.

Now, nature does not function as it is intended. Weather patterns go crazy and cause natural disasters like tornadoes and hurricanes, a host of diseases contaminate this world and kill people, and plants and animals wither and die.

And not only that, because of our twisted desires, we use nature in ways it wasn't supposed to be used. We create and abuse drugs made from plants, we create and consume food that isn't all that healthy for us, we use technology to hurt our neighbor (just take a look at social media nowadays), and host of other examples.

And so creation groans, as Paul says in the text. All of creation groans because it wants the suffering, the evil, to stop. We groan because WE want the suffering to stop. We want it to

end. We cry out, like Paul did in our Romans 7 text from last week, who will save us? Who will deliver us from these bodies of death, from these times of suffering? And that is what Paul is answering in the text. He directs us away from our sufferings and to the future hope of glory we have waiting for us.

Because the groanings we have now are in anticipation of the coming glory of renewal and redemption.

We, like the rest of the creation, want the suffering to stop. When I hear the news today, I just want it to stop. The only way all these sufferings are going to stop forever is when Christ returns, ushering in the new heaven and new earth, free of evil and sin.

Christ began this process with his death and resurrection on the cross in our place. It was there that he took the sins of the entire world upon his shoulders and paid the price for them in our place

You see, because the wages of sin is death, as Paul says earlier in Romans, someone had to die for sins. It should have been us, as we are each individually responsible for our own sin. However, Christ took our punishment, and we receive the benefits of his redemptive act by payment of his blood. And with that act, he defeated sin, death, and the devil, and thus sent us, and creation as a whole, on a course to redemption and restoration. Christ reversed the curse that occurred in Genesis 3. And that is the hope that we are groaning for.

Creation groans, as it says in verse 22, with birth pains. Creation is groaning as in pain during birth, with the expectation that the groaning, the suffering, the pain, will stop, and joy will be ushered in, just like how a mother is in great pain during childbirth, but that pain turns to joy and love when the baby is delivered.

We humans, and especially Christians, have a different experience in our groaning, but it is similar. We groan with anticipation as well, but in anticipation of the full consummation of our adoption as children of God.

You see, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the gift of faith, as Paul says in verse 23, is the “firstfruits” of this future restoration. This word has a rich history in the Old Testament. In Old Testament times, the “firstfruits” of the harvest was the very first produce of the harvest, and it was given to God with the hope that everyone else would enjoy the rest of the harvest later. Paul is using that concept to illustrate something to his audience, especially then, and to us now. The gift of the Holy Spirit, given to us by faith, is the assurance of our future renewal

We are regenerated and sanctified by faith now, and the Holy Spirit is the proof of that fact. However, it is also the promise that we will be regenerated and renewed by sight as well! Just as our minds have been made new, but we struggle against the sin in our bodies now, our bodies will become new and restored when Christ returns. Our bodies as we have them now will come out of the grave, resurrected and renewed, free of the sin that hampers us now. Our struggle with sin that I talked about last week will be over, and all the evil and suffering we see now will be gone, never to return again.

So, with that glorious hope in mind, we persevere in hope in the midst of our suffering.

Though we have encountered suffering, are encountering it, and will continue to encounter it until the end, we are not without hope.

We don't see our hope yet, but that's what makes it hope in the first place. As Paul says in verse 24, who hopes for what he sees? If our hope has already come to fruition, it is simply reality. It ceases to be hope. But hope that is not seen, that is what we're "eagerly waiting" for.

And I like the picture that Paul paints for this expectation in verse 19. The English says "eager expectation," and then the Greek kind of fills in the details of what the eager expectation looks like. It's like looking toward the horizon, or down the road, or something like that and you crane your neck as you look so you can get the first glimpse as soon as you can. If I may wax eloquent about Carl Rosenius once again, he gives another excellent illustration of this hope as we wait. He likens it to a farmer planting and waiting for his seed. Just as a farmer plants their seeds and awaits their crop, we await our full restoration as we have the seed of faith, the Holy Spirit, planted in us.

And that's how we wait for the Lord, especially nowadays. With all this bad news and tragic situations happening all around us, we look even more longingly for the horizon, waiting in hope for Christ's return.

So as you, as we, navigate this crazy world right now, be encouraged that this is not how things will be for eternity. In fact, eternity has the opposite in mind. Sufferings will cease, evil will desist, and sin and death will be no more. We, you, the rest of creation, will be renewed and restored in glory when Christ returns.

So, as we groan because of our sin in eager expectation of the coming renewal and redemption, we persevere in hope in the midst of our sufferings. Because, as Paul at the beginning of our text, our present sufferings will NOT compare to the glory that is coming. And it's not even close.

Though a pandemic rages, though people are angry and at each other's throats, though a whole host of uncertainties, and probably other sufferings, await us right now, it will not be like that forever. Any day now, Christ will return and usher in a new heaven and a new earth, free of suffering, of tears, of disease, of sin, and even of death. So while we wait, and we suffer, we continue to look to the cross in hope, knowing that Christ will come again, and make these present sufferings as nothing, compared to the glory that He will bring. Amen.