

More Than
Week 5: Eager Expectation
Romans 8:17-21

“No such thing as a silly question.” – Get the heart behind it, but a lot of people have tried *really hard* to prove that theory wrong!

- How did people in the Middle Ages know what skeletons look like without an X-ray machine?
- Is there any sort of book subscription for kids where you order books, and once you read them, you can return them and get more?
- Is cereal a soup? – Okay, that one had me thinking for a bit. Like a Gazpacho?
- Tourist in the Roman colosseum, “Is this where Jesus fought the lions?”

Some questions might actually be a *little* silly, and we can probably all think of times when we’ve asked a question that didn’t quite come out right. But, there are some questions that, it doesn’t matter who you are, or what you believe, we’ve probably all thought about them before. In fact, every religion, every philosophy, every worldview...they’re all trying to answer five basic questions about life.

1) Where did we come from? How did everything begin? Who or what created the world? Where did the most fundamental building blocks of life come from?

2) Why are we here? What is the purpose of life? What gives our life meaning and value?

3) What’s wrong with the world? Why is there so much evil and suffering?

4) How can it be made right? How can we fix what is broken in our world and our lives?

5) Where is all of this headed? What happens after we die? How will the story of humanity end?

You’ve probably never written these questions down, but my guess is that you’ve asked them before. And even if you’ve never asked them out loud, you’ve probably felt them. Questions like these have a way of showing up in moments of awe, and in moments of pain.

- Holding a newborn baby – amazed by the miracle of life.
- Standing at a graveside – confronted with the reality of death.

- Scrolling the news – *What is going on? What is wrong with our world? Is there any hope that things will get better?*

We're all looking for answers to these same questions. And, for a lot of people, maybe even us sometimes, the answers sound like this:

1) Where did we come from? We're here by chance. The universe is a cosmic accident, and we're the lucky ones who've made it this far.

2) Why are we here? We're here to be happy. To find ourselves, live our truth, and chase our dreams. You only live once, so make the most of the time you have because when it's gone, it's gone.

3) What's wrong with the world? People keep getting in the way of my happiness! The problem is other people who see the world differently than I do, and if we can just straighten them out, then we'll be okay.

4) How can it be made right? Try harder and do better. And if you find yourself being overcome by the pain of this world, at least manage your image so that no one else knows about it.

5) Where is all of this headed? Hopefully somewhere good, but I don't want to think about that, so I just distract myself, keep myself busy, and hope that somehow, someday, things will just work themselves out.

This is the story most people are swimming in. And, I'll tell you, it sounds good, but it doesn't hold water when the weight of real life hits. It doesn't offer anything of value when someone you love gets sick. When your marriage falls apart. When the headlines are relentless.

If you've ever found yourself thinking, *there has to be more than this...* you're right. The Bible tells us a different story. A **better** story. The Bible answers these questions in a way that points us to hope.

1) Where did we come from? We were created by God, in His image.

2) Why are we here? To know Him, to love Him, and to reflect His goodness in the world.

3) What's wrong with the world? Sin. Our rebellion against God fractured everything.

4) How can it be made right? God himself stepped into our brokenness through Jesus to redeem and restore what was lost.

5) Where is all of this headed? Toward renewal. A new heaven and a new earth where God dwells with His people and every tear is wiped away.

And it's this last question, *Where is all this headed*, that Paul picks up on in our text today. He is writing to followers of Jesus who are suffering, longing for glory, and waiting for redemption. And in our text today, he wants to remind us that our waiting is not wasted. It's building towards something far more beautiful than we can even imagine.

And some of us need to be reminded of that today because we are waiting through grief, and it hurts. Paul is going to take this ache that we feel from living in this broken and fallen world, and reframe it through the lenses of eternity. And he reminds us that the story God is writing doesn't end with sorrow and despair. It is all moving towards redemption and renewal.

Vs. 17 – Being a co-heir with Christ means we will share in both his cross and his resurrection. His pain and his glory.

- Some pain comes from following him. “They hate you because they hate me.” “They don’t reject you, they reject me.”
- Some pain because we just live in a world marred by sin. Bodies fail us. Natural disasters happen. People can’t work together, so wars break out and governments shut down.
- “Share in his glory...” Jesus glory was his resurrection. Paul starts to lift our gaze from the pain and suffering around us, to the eternal hope that we have in Christ.

Vs. 18 – “I consider...” = English word: Logic. He’s added up the good and the bad, weighed it against eternity...

- One side of scale: every tear, every loss, every pain.
- Other side: the glory that awaits us.
- Calculation: “Our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us.”
- Seems so insensitive to our present sufferings, UNLESS, Paul knows something I sometimes forget: **The things that feel heavy now are light and momentary compared to eternity.**

Life is hard and heavy now, but for those who are in Christ, we don’t have to carry it alone. God, our Father, is near to the brokenhearted, and close to those who suffer. And one day, He will take these burdens and lay them to the side, once and for all. There will be no more pain and suffering and death and cancer.

Paul pivots just a little bit here and says we're not the only ones waiting for this day...

Vs. 19 – Paul personifies Creation. Waits in “eager expectation”

- Lit. “stretch the head forward to see what’s coming.”
- Illustration: Started driving, mom would stretch her head from passenger side to see what was coming. “Mom, when you do that, I can’t see!”
- That’s the picture Paul paints. Creation is straining to see what God will do next..
- Why is Creation “eagerly expecting” the children of God to be revealed?
 - “Children of God to be revealed” – Culmination of all things. When God will set the world right, once and for all. Those in Christ are fully revealed to be part of God’s family.
 - Genesis 3 and the Fall. Relationships that were broken:
 - Us and God
 - Us and Each Other
 - Us and Ourselves (well-being)
 - Us and Creation
 - In Genesis 2, God gave Adam the job of stewarding His Creation. Caring for it.
 - In Genesis 3, that relationship was broken. Part of the curse of sin is that the ground would produce thorns and thistles. There wouldn’t be a collaborative relationship between us and Creation, and we continue to experience the effects of that today in floods and tornados and hurricanes.

Vs. 20-21 – Sin didn’t just break our relationship with God, it brought brokenness into our world.

- God subjected us and creation to the curse of sin and death.
- We can be redeemed through Jesus and experience freedom from it, while we await the ultimate freedom that is coming.
- But Creation can’t. It can only wait for God to fully and finally redeem, restore, and renew all things.

Jesus started the work to reverse the curse of sin. We get to experience it in part when we place our faith in Him, but one day, all of Creation, and everyone who has trusted in Him, will experience it in full. A day when nothing and no one will be bound by the curse of sin and death any longer.

This is God's ultimate desire. To glorify what has been broken by sin, including His Creation.

I think sometimes we forget that, when Scripture talks about Heaven and eternity, it doesn't talk about a place we will go. It talks about a place that comes to us. God's not going to destroy this world we live in, He's going to transform it back to the way He created it to be. Like us, it will be made new and glorious.

John gives us a glimpse of this in Revelation 21...(READ Rev. 21:1-5a)

In these 5 verses, Paul lifts our eyes from the pain of brokenness around us and reminds us that, while it's this way now, it won't be this way forever. God himself will one day liberate us from death and decay and bodies that fail us in a world that seems set against us. One day, ALL CREATION will be set free. Will be redeemed, restored, and renewed.

We believe that day is coming, and we wait with eager expectation for it, but what about now? Many of us feel like we are leaning in, stretching out our neck, looking to see where God is and what He's doing in the midst of the pain we feel. So, what do we do while we wait?

If you've seen anyone wearing one of the "Do it for Matt" shirts, on the back it says, "Cling to the Lord." This has been Matt's mantra over the last year, and he's shown us what it looks like to live with that kind of faith. He's reminded us that faith isn't the absence of fear – it's choosing to cling to Jesus in the midst of it.

Psalm 63:8 says, "My soul clings to You; Your right hand upholds me." It's a picture of deep, mutual attachment and loyalty. We cling to God and He clings to us. ***Not because He needs us, but because He knows how desperately we need Him.***

"Cling to the Lord." That's what faithful waiting looks like. And I wish I had something more profound to tell you, but that's the message of Scripture that we see over, and over, and over.

When life feels like it's slipping through your hands, tighten your grip on Jesus. Seek Him through His Word, through prayer, with fellow believers. We are God's children. We have been adopted into His family. And so, we don't have to cling to the Lord to try to earn something. We cling to our Heavenly Father because we've been given all we need in Him to keep walking faithfully in the highs and lows of life.

And we believe that one day, the Lord we cling to will make good on every promise. The waiting will end, the suffering will cease. The glory we've been stretching our necks to see will fill the whole earth, and all things will be made new.

If you've never trusted your life to Jesus. If you've been trying to hold everything together on your own, this is your invitation to let go of everything you've been holding onto and take hold of the only One who can carry you through life. He's not distant, He's not indifferent. He knows you and He loves you and He's inviting you to follow Him.

Communion

Reminds us that Jesus entered into our pain so that, one day, we could enter into His joy.

Every time we take communion, we're not just remembering what Jesus did, we're reminding ourselves of the hope we have in Him. We're proclaiming, "Jesus, I'm clinging to you until the day when You make all things new."