

God will certainly fulfill the hope of Christians to be saved from agonizing sufferings because in the end nothing will separate us from Christ’s love for us. Following Christ’s pattern, suffering will end in death, but death is not our end. By dying and rising in Christ we shall conquer through hope and live forever.

Introduction – We’re wrapping up a series on what I call “universal human longings.” This one is last because, more than any of the other sermons, it makes the transition from this life to the next. You’ll notice the first word in the title: death. What?!? This sound ridiculous. Who longs for death?

I. Heaven: Our Groaning Hope

A. For an earthy yet glorious eternity (vv. 21-22)

The creation is groaning, something like a mother in labor groaning in birth pangs, as it longs for the day when salvation that has already come for God’s children will be finally complete. Creation will be set free from the curse and the effects of sin. It will instantly become glorified, which must mean it will become far more beautiful, productive, and habitable than anyone can imagine. The wonder of such a revealing on the last day will be such an overwhelming manifestation of glory that all harm and loss will be totally wiped away to make way for the regeneration of all things (Matthew 19:28; Acts 3:21; Revelation 21:1).

B. For a reunion with our spiritual family (vv. 19, 23, 29)

God gives us a picture of a reunion with our spiritual family. We can rejoice that God’s normal means of populating heaven is by working through human households—we can them covenant families. And yet God redirects our longing for a family reunion by creating a spiritually renewed family. Throughout this passage we read language of foreknowing, sonship, adoption, brotherhood, the elect, being born of God, and the family of God (cf. Romans 8:15,17; 11:2; 1 Corinthians 15:25-58; 2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:14; Revelation 21:1-5; 22:5). The people whom God wants to experience and enjoy the regeneration of all creation are first and foremost his adopted children. He transformed them into the glorious likeness of his firstborn Son.

II. Heaven: Our Terrible Obstacles

A. Frustration (vv. 18-22)

Notice that the Christian worldview is uniquely perceptive in its assessment of creation. As resilient as the world appears to be, upon close inspection and introspection it reveals itself to be physically decaying and spiritually infected with sin and moral corruption. According to the Bible, God is the one who subjected the creation to futility in response to Adam and Eve bringing sin and death into the world through Adam’s original sin (Gen 3:17). God is the one who cursed the ground (i.e., the creation). We know deep down that death is not natural, that our universal human longing for eternal life can’t be wishful thinking but must somehow be grounded in spiritual reality. But we also look around and see death is universal, hence our frustration. We know that creation is not the way it’s supposed to be.

B. Discouragement (vv. 23-25, 33-34)

When Paul mentions the hope of redemption of our bodies, he’s first referring to our hope of escaping the frustration of the fallen creation. But make sure you don’t forget why the creation is fallen. It’s our fault because we sinned in Adam’s original sin, and we continue to sin by following his pattern. Do you realize you’ve got powerful enemies in high places who watch your every careless word, record

your every bad-faith action or inaction, and they are even pretty good at reading your every evil thought? The Bible calls them rulers, powers, principalities, and demons. You could say their whole mission is to make sure you are condemned to hopelessness and eternal hell. Knowing this, you can imagine what it feels like to be exposed as a fraud, a hypocrite, as someone not worthy of defending or befriending. Discouragement can be a major obstacle to heaven.

C. Separation (vv. 35-39)

Seven represents a complete list: tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness (or exposure owing to inadequate clothing), danger, sword. Paul quotes Psalm 44:22 to show these sufferings do in fact befall God's people in the new covenant era. Psalm 44 is a corporate lament which gives voice to the pleas of innocent believers from the depths of their suffering. The point is we as 21st century Americans are not exempt, even from being murdered like sheep to be slaughtered. Tracing this theme back to the Old Testament proves that the very worst kinds of suffering have always been a part of the experience of God's people.

III. Heaven: Our Trinitarian Assurance

A. You have a sovereign Judge who is always for you (vv. 28-33)

If you are of the company who love God, who are called according to his purpose, then all things work together for good. From its beginning in eternity past, to its end in eternity future, God's plan to fit his children for heaven never loses a single person along the way. The exact same people who are foreknown by him from the foundations of the earth are the same people who will be glorified in the end. So if God is for you, if he went so far as to give up his own Son on the cross for you, if no one can bring any charge against you that will stick because God is the one who justifies you, then how will God not also graciously give you all things?

B. You have an indwelling Advocate who always helps you (vv. 26-27)

The Holy Spirit knows your weakness and he's closer than anyone else to you because he lives inside you. You have an Advocate who knows your mind and God's mind better than anyone (1 Samuel 16:7; 1 Kings 8:39; 1 Chronicles 28:9; Psalm 139:1-2; Proverbs 15:11; Jeremiah 17:9-10; Acts 1:24; 1 Corinthians 4:5; Hebrews 4:13). Although we are continually conscious of our weakness and the suffering in and around us, we know the Spirit strengthens us in the midst of it all. He is always helping you on the road to heaven — especially in the midst of your suffering.

C. You have a mighty Redeemer who always loves you (vv. 34-39)

How can Christians not only survive suffering, but be called more than conquerors? If believers cannot be defeated and separated from God even by their most powerful enemies, then nothing can do the job, right? "Through him who loved us"—referring to the love of Christ demonstrated for his people on the cross—we have conquered and we will conquer. The cross of Christ is the road to heaven. God always uses suffering to prepare his children for glory. That doesn't mean you need to be a mighty redeemer who conquers your obstacles to heaven (sin and its effects of futility, discouragement, separation). You just need to trust in the one who conquered the power of sin and suffering on the cross. We are more than conquerors through faith in him who conquered for us.

Conclusion – Did you know that approximately 6 years after Paul sent this letter to the church in Rome—a church that was powerful, wealthy, and privileged—the emperor began killing hundreds of Roman Christians (starting in AD 64)? God's words are relevant and timely because he knows all our days and wants to prepare us for what is to come. That is why it's so important to not merely listen, but to let his perspective on suffering, death, and eternity transform you as if God is speaking directly to you. Because in this moment, he is! O that we would hear and heed his voice!