

Waiting For Glory

Romans 8:18-28

Does anyone enjoy waiting? It feels like such a waste of precious time. It doesn't matter where you are or what you are doing, waiting just seems so purposeless. Granted, most of the time, when we have to wait, we are still relatively comfortable as we are waiting. We can usually find some productive way to pass the time. But add to your waiting the element of suffering, and then groaning begins to occur. Just spend some time in the waiting room of the ER.

This is a sermon about waiting. As children of God we are waiting. We are waiting to experience glory, to live in the state of glory... to experience our glorious inheritance.

One of the most difficult things for me personally is to patiently wait for something I know is going to be really good. And glory is going to be really, really good.

Glory is not easy to describe. It is like trying to describe snow to someone who has never seen it. Often when we hope for things in this life, when we get them, they are not actually as wonderful as we imagined they would be. Well, glory is the one thing that will surpass every hope, every imagination. Glory is above and beyond everything that we could ask or imagine. But we do not possess glory yet. We must wait for it.

Read Romans 8:18-28.

The waiting that we are called to is not a comfortable one. It involves suffering. And when you combine waiting with suffering you get groaning.

You may have noticed in this passage that groaning flows out of three distinct sources.

1. The Creation is groaning.
2. The Children of God are groaning.
3. The Holy Spirit is groaning.

Before we explore this passage, I want to present to you an important ridge line. Groaning is an important aspect of waiting. In some mysterious way, groaning can, and should, occur simultaneously with joy and thankfulness and hope. Without these, groaning turns into complaining, bitterness, and despair.

We do not want to fall off the ridge into despair. But neither do we want to fall off the ridge on the other side. This would look like an attempt to force "glory" into our present experience. That, as Christians we should be experiencing the fullness of joy now without any groaning, as if there is nothing more to come.

Somehow we need to walk the ridge of learning to groan without it turning into bitter complaining. We need to find contentment in our discontentments... Why does God make us wait, anyway? If we are heirs and co-heirs with Jesus Christ, why are we still groaning?

Why is our loving Father forcing us to wait? Why does He not just give us glory now? As those who have been justified through faith in Jesus Christ, you are no longer being held for eternal condemnation. Jesus Christ, in his person and work, has earned for you glory. It is already yours. So, why make you wait?

This is not the time to explore all of God's purposes in our present sufferings. We will stick to Romans 8. Here, Paul seems to assume one primary reason. The purpose of our present sufferings is that they further bind us together with Jesus in his sufferings.

Look at verse 17 of Romans 8.

Romans 8:16 we are children of God,
Romans 8:17 provided we suffer with him
in order that we may also be glorified with him.

It is the "with him" that connects suffering and glory. As Christians we are united with Jesus Christ. Jesus suffered before he was raised to glory. He endured suffering, and then was raised to glory. Because we are united to Jesus Christ, we too walk the same path as He did. We suffer now, and then we are raised to glory. The present groanings are providing the means by which we share in the sufferings of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 3:10 ¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

Maybe Jesus enables us to feel this intimacy with him now, in part, at times. But I think we will not fully feel this connection to Jesus until we are with him in glory.

Soldiers who live together through the horrors of battle forge a bond that exists long after they are off the battlefield.

Our present waiting, and groaning, is further bonding us to Jesus Christ. I admit, it doesn't always feel like it right now. But it most certainly is forging bonds that we will enjoy for all eternity. The suffering that we experience "with him now" is intimately connected with sharing glory with him. If there is no fellowship with him now in suffering, there will not be any fellowship with him in glory. Often, we are looking for purpose for our suffering in the present. This is not necessarily bad. But our suffering will not make full sense to us until we are experiencing our future glory. It is only through the lens of future glory that we will ever be able to have a right perspective on our present sufferings.

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.

“I consider”

Paul is using his ability to reason. He is thinking logically. He is taking the time to consider the truths that have been revealed to him about future glory in the context of the feelings of suffering that he is presently experiencing. What is Paul’s conclusion?

As bad as his present sufferings might be, they are a drop in the bucket compared to the glories that he will soon be experiencing.

Look at that last line of v. 18: “revealed to us”

The Greek word is “eis” which can certainly have the meaning of “to”. But this word can also mean “in” or “into”. Both the KJV and the NIV have “in us”.

The idea is that the future glory is not merely something that we observe, but rather is something of which we are a part.

“In other words, this glory will, as it were, come to us, enter us, and then, having filled us and enveloped us, will be revealed in us. We ourselves will be part of that glory: the redeemed will see it in each other.” Hendrikson

It is important to understand that Paul cannot fully describe this glory to us. He is apprehending it only with the eyes of faith. This glory has not yet been revealed. It is a glory that already exists, even within us by the indwelling Holy Spirit, but it is still concealed.

Just how good this glory is going to be no one knows.

Earlier we referred to glory as being far better than the best that this world has to offer. But here Paul does just the opposite.

Think about the worst that this world has to offer. Consider the pain, the suffering, the catastrophes, the evils... put them all in a bucket. Paul says that they are not worth comparing to the greatness of the glory on the other side.

The glory is greater than the suffering. It is not even going to be close. We need to remember that on the day that our heart is breaking. Paul begins with the application: Consider the awesomeness of future glory!

But I encourage you to remember the ridge line. Contemplate future glory. But do not think that something is wrong if you still experience groaning. Present groaning may even be more powerful because you know the weight of future glory. The more you are anticipating the prize ahead, the more agony you may feel while you wait.

This passage includes three sources of ongoing groaning: The Creation, the Child of God, and the Holy Spirit.

The Creation is groaning!

Romans 8:19-22 ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing 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 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

The Creation was subjected to futility. It was subjected unwillingly. It was subjected in Hope.

Futility

mataio,thj - *futility, frustration, purposelessness, meaninglessness*

If you want to understand this word, read the book of Ecclesiastes. Vanity is a word often used there.

Kids, let me give you a good picture of futility. Have you ever built something with blocks? Maybe you sat down with blocks of all different shapes and sizes and you decided that you were going to build something really cool. You have built things before, but today you really want to take the time and effort and creativity to make something worth showing to mom and dad. After working for some time, you are almost finished with your masterpiece. You are about to put the final block on and call mom and dad in to see what you have done. But before you can get the words out of your mouth, the dog comes into the room wagging his tail and knocks the whole thing over. Or worse yet, your younger brother or sister. That is frustration. That is futility.

Adults, if you are looking, this sort of thing happens all the time, in all sorts of ways. Droughts, hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, famines. Disease, pestilence, weeds, thorns, pandemics. Sickness, the effects of aging, death, in ourselves or loved ones.

Futility comes to us in relationships. It can be so difficult to make good friends. And then, when you are blessed with good friends, life takes them away. Futility comes to us in our own bodies. We struggle to maintain health and maybe have some success. But we all know we are fighting a losing battle. This is not to say that this world does not provide much good. It certainly does. And we must learn to be thankful for every good gift that comes down to us from our loving Father. But the creation does not provide for us as originally intended. It falls short in a million ways.

In this passage, Paul personifies the creation. That means he gives to the creation the thoughts and feelings of humans. The flowers and the trees are not sentient beings. The animals we love do not actually contemplate the New Heavens and New Earth. We, of all the creation, have the capacity to eagerly long for the “revealing of the sons of God.”

But personification is very effective in communicating truth.

Paul wants us to think about the truth that this Creation is not doing all that it can do for us. The Creation was designed to serve us. And it certainly does serve us. But it does not serve us to the fullest.

Some parts of creation seem to do better than other parts. The soil in Burke County that is near to the rivers is better for crops than most of the red clay that we are familiar with. I am quite certain that the mosquito has a better purpose than what it is presently doing. I can only imagine how will weeds be fixed to fulfill their higher calling?

What will the weather patterns be like when they give the perfect amounts of water and sunshine so that plants are neither thirsty nor flooded?

How wonderful to watch a tree grow to its full height and not fear that it will fall on your house!

And, through personification, Paul helps us to see that the Creation does not want to be this way. The creation longs to be all that it was meant to be.

20 For the creation was subjected to futility,
not willingly,
but
because of him who subjected it,

I know that we do not want to take the personification thing too far. But let's just for a moment think of the entire creation as one large person, or many little persons, with feelings.

The Creation would be the truest victim. In the Garden, Adam and Eve sinned. The rest of creation did not do anything wrong. And yet, the creation is subjected to futility. The creation had no say so in the matter. God simply places the curse upon her. She will bear thorns and thistles. And through no fault of her own, she suffers. Think about that the next time that you watch an animal suffer. At least, when we humans suffer, we sense that we brought this on ourselves. But not animals.

Joel 1:17-18 ¹⁷ The seed shrivels under the clods;¹ the storehouses are desolate; the granaries are torn down because the grain has dried up. ¹⁸ How the beasts groan! The herds of cattle are perplexed because there is no pasture for them; even the flocks of sheep suffer.¹

Don't take what I am saying and think that I am promoting being Vegan. I am not. After the flood, God clearly gave us the right to even eat animals.

I just want you to feel that the creation does not really want to serve you as pathetically as it does. The creation is yearning for the day when it can serve you fully and completely.

The creation is in bondage to decay, and she eagerly yearns to be freed... when you are freed. God is the One who put her into this bondage. And He did it in hope of releasing her on the Day when the children of God are revealed.

Practical side applications: We are called to diligently strive to care for this creation and to cultivate it and to make it beautiful. But we do this knowing that the creation is in bondage to decay. We cannot fully reverse the curse.

There is beauty in the raw creation. But there is also devastation. Do not buy into the lie that if we just left the creation alone that it would somehow be perfect. It will not. It is a noble ideal to want to fix the creation. But trying to save the spotted owl from extinction pales in comparison to calling people to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. The perfection of the creation is united to the salvation of people.

God is the one who altered the created order such that it would not longer deliver true and lasting life to its inhabitants. And He did this in hope.

21 in hope
 that the creation itself
 will be set free
 from its bondage to decay
 and
 obtain the freedom
 of the glory of the children of God.

Just as we as God's children are being set free from our sin, so the creation will also be set free from its bondage to decay. The freedom of the glory of the children of God. At the very time that you are languishing in decaying bodies in a decaying world, God promises to you glory. Freedom and glory. The temptation that Satan encourages, and that we often believe, is that this world can actually deliver the life for which we yearn.

It cannot.

The frustrations of life are God's gift to lead you to Christ.

22 For we know
 that the whole creation has been groaning together
 in the pains of childbirth
 until now.

The creation is groaning like a mother in labor. She is yearning for the children of God to be revealed. Her glory is connected to our glory.

We, as children of God, are also groaning.

23

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.

Paul does not say that immature groan, but those who are walking in the Spirit have risen above groaning. He does not say that we might groan. No, Paul sees groaning as an essential part of what it means to be a Christian. “We groan inwardly...” That is what we do.

And our groaning occurs because we have the firstfruits of the Spirit. What does this mean? We have the Holy Spirit, who is the down payment of future glory. We have the Holy Spirit, but not yet in the fullness that we will have him in glory. Both are true.

The Holy Spirit has awakened within you a truer sense of glory. But he has not yet delivered you to that glory. And so you groan inwardly, because you have the Holy Spirit, for glory. But it is also true that your present experience of the Holy Spirit is not all that you will experience of him in glory. You only possess the “firstfruits” of the Spirit. We are told that the Spirit dwelt within Jesus “without measure”. That means: in fullness.

We have not yet experienced the Spirit in his fullness.

Do you groan inwardly for more the Spirit’s power? That is itself the working of the Holy Spirit in your heart. Even while the Holy Spirit is working thankfulness and contentment in you, He is also working in you a hungering and a thirsting for the fullness of his power.

Having the firstfruits of the Spirit is like being given one bite of the apple pie (my favorite desert) and then putting the rest of the pie in a Tupperware container for later. It is like watching the trailer of a movie. The trailer makes you want to watch the rest of the movie.

Only those having the firstfruits of the Spirit have the capacity to inwardly groan. Only they know something of the glory that awaits. As God’s children, we do not have to wonder if we are actually going to receive that fullness. Our union with Jesus Christ and the truth of Justification by faith alone declares to us that we are heirs and co-heirs with Christ.

No, we are not to wonder if that grace is going to be given. Instead, we are to wait eagerly for it to be given. We endure all sorts of suffering knowing that we have a perfect future awaiting us. Paul describes this glorious future in two ways.

He calls it: Our adoption as sons. The redemption of our bodies

If you remember from last week, we were given the right to become God's children when we believe. We have already been adopted. But Paul says here that we are eagerly awaiting our adoption. What can he possibly mean?

Simply this: you are a child of God now, but it certainly does not look like it. Just like when Jesus was on this earth, it did not always look like he was the Son of God. God led his own Son into mocking and taunting and sorrow and pain. But now, Jesus is reigning next to the Father. He suffered humiliation before he was raised to his true glory as the Son of God. We walk the same path.

We are God's sons now, but God has not yet given us all the blessings of our sonship. Many are still to come. The moment of our adoption will occur simultaneously with the redemption of our bodies. This is nothing less than the Resurrection from the dead.

Our bodies will be transformed. They will either be changed in the twinkling of an eye, or they will be raised up out of their tombs. But either way, they will be glorious.

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

"In this hope we were saved..."

When a person trusts in Jesus, they do not do so for the blessings that they receive immediately. They look to Jesus for blessing, every spiritual blessing, but they should not be told that they will receive every blessing in this life. They trust in Christ to give them the fullness of glory. They want full fellowship with God. They want complete freedom from all sin. They want the life of eternal bliss. These are not given in their fullness right now.

In fact, Paul says that if in this life only we were saved, then we are to be pitied above all men. So, as Christians we continue to live by faith. We continue to hope for what we do not see – for what we are not yet experiencing. And Paul says, "We wait for it with patience."

I do not think he had me in mind. I am so impatient. We hate to wait. And yet, that is what God has called us to do... to wait. So much sin arises from wanting our glory now! Impatience is a terrible sin that leads us to other terrible sins. Let's us confess our sin of impatience. And let us plead with God for greater mercy to wait for glory rather than seeking it in this life. The creation is groaning. We are groaning as we are waiting. Thirdly, the Spirit is groaning.

26

Likewise
the Spirit helps us in our weakness.
For we do not know what to pray for as we ought,
but
the Spirit himself intercedes for us
with groanings too deep for words.

27

And
he who searches hearts
knows what is the mind of the Spirit,
because the Spirit intercedes for the saints
according to the will of God.

One day the Holy Spirit will bring us to glory. Right now he is helping us in our weakness.

The Holy Spirit does not overcome our weakness entirely. But he does help us in it. He preserves us in the faith. He keeps us from abandoning the faith.

He continues to work godliness into our souls. The Holy Spirit is stirring us to pray.

The Spirit is helping us to know what to pray. But the Holy Spirit is doing more than these things. The Holy Spirit is interceding for us according to the will of God.

What does this mean? It means that the Holy Spirit always asks the Father to do in you what is necessary to prepare you for glory. Is there anyone else who knows you so perfectly?

And is there anyone else who knows the heart of God and his purposes for you so perfectly?

This is what makes the intercession of the Spirit so precious.

It is good and right for us to pray for God to relieve suffering. We are commanded to do this in the Lord's Prayer when we are to pray for our daily bread. But how many of us are able to recognize what it is that God is doing in our suffering?

The Holy Spirit knows perfectly what God is doing. And He is continually interceding on your behalf for God to continue this work. The Father listens to the intercession of the Spirit and he knows that the groanings of the Spirit are perfectly aligned with His own determined will.

Our prayers are often misguided. We want things that are not necessarily right for us. The Holy Spirit is working at a deeper level. His prayers are always, "Father, work in him to prepare him for glory."

"Christ prays that the merits of his (Christ's) redemptive work may be fully applied to those who trust in him. The Holy Spirit prays that the deeply hidden needs of our hearts, needs which we ourselves sometimes do not even recognize, may be met. Christ's intercession may be compared with that of a father, the head of the family, for all the family members. The Holy

Spirit's intercession reminds us rather of a mother kneeling at the bedside of her ailing child, and in her prayer presenting that child's needs to the heavenly Father." Hendrikson

The prayers of the Holy Spirit are effectual just as are the prayers of the Son. It is one thing to know that Jesus is praying for you from his throne above. It is another thing to know that within your very soul is the Holy Spirit crying out for you in perfect alignment with the will of God.

The creation is groaning to see glory revealed in you. Then and only then will she know her own release from bondage to decay.

You are groaning because you are not yet yourself who you ought to be or who you will indeed be. And you continue to live in a world that remains in bondage to decay.

The Spirit is groaning because God's work in you is not yet complete. He yearns to complete the work of redemption in you. The work that has been fully bought and paid for by the blood of Jesus Christ.

It is only as we recognize each of these groanings that we are in a place to come to the conclusion that Paul reaches in Romans 8:28.

Memorize this verse by itself and you will surely be blessed. Understand this verse in its context and you will find hope to make it to the end.

28

And
we know

that for those who love God
all things work together for good,
for those who are called according to his purpose.

It is only because the Holy Spirit is working deep in your soul that Romans 8:28 is true.

The unbeliever cannot have assurance that all things are working together for his good. Only the one who has been called by God and who has the Holy Spirit continually interceding on his behalf can have confidence that every moment of his life is being used for his good and God's glory.

But knowing that God is working "all things" for good does not mean that we do not groan. We surely do. But in our groaning we do not become bitter. We continue to wait, knowing that no matter how difficult it may seem now, the glory that awaits us will far exceed the groaning. And, what is more, it is the groaning that will bring Jesus back.

Psalm 12:5 ⁵ "Because the poor are plundered, because the needy groan, I will now arise," says the LORD; "I will place him in the safety for which he longs."

Waiting... that's what we are doing. Waiting for glory!
And groaning... in patient hope!

Amen!