

Groaning for Glory

Romans 8:18-27

As I am getting older I find myself groaning much more than I used to. I groan when I stand up after sitting for awhile. I groan when I sit after I've been standing for awhile. I groan in the morning, groan at night, and groan after I've eaten too much. I groan when I see some of the things going on in this world, I groan when I get another bill in the mail, and when other drivers don't drive like I think they ought to. I groan when I don't feel like I have enough time to get everything finished.

In verses 18-27 of the Romans chapter eight the word groan is used three times. We are told the creation groans, believers groan, and the Holy Spirit within us groans. This groaning of which Paul writes is not a complaining or a grumbling, but it is a longing, an expectation, a certain hope that cannot be fully expressed in words.

Listen to the Word of God as I read to you from Romans 8:18-27.

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.

26 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

27 Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

Let's put this passage in its proper context. Paul has been talking to us about the rich privilege that is ours in Christ to be children of God and the glory that we will share with the Lord. However, as we saw last time, suffering precedes glory. We are destined to be heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ in a glorious inheritance. We have a taste of that glory now with all of God's blessings to us as the children of God but what we will be and what we will experience has not yet been revealed in us. So now in this life, for a little while, like our Savior Jesus, we must endure suffering in this fallen world of sin.

Not only is there the natural human suffering of disease and disasters, of crime and wars, of getting older and going through the difficult transitions of life, there is also the suffering that comes from being a child of God. There is a cost that comes with following Jesus.

Make no mistake, the Bible never tells us that if we come to Jesus all our problems will go away. We will be set free from the condemnation of sin and made new in Christ but we will also be people who are going against the culture of our world. Here in the United States we may not be imprisoned or executed like believers in other countries yet, but we will face ridicule and rejection from many.

How do we stand in times such as this? Paul tells us that we need to look to the future glory. He doesn't tell us that for everything you suffer there will be an equal blessing in Heaven. In verse 18 Paul tells us that the blessings are so much greater than the suffering that it is not even worth trying to compare the two. Our suffering is virtually insignificant in comparison to the glory that is waiting for us in Heaven. It is this thought of our glorious inheritance that gets Paul thinking about groaning.

Everything is groaning. Everything is waiting for what is to come. The creation is waiting, the believers are waiting, and even the Holy Spirit is waiting in anticipation of what is to come. And the wait is a groaning wait because we have to endure the effects of a fallen world, the effects of sin. And so creation groans, and so believers groan, and so the Holy Spirit groans for the fulfillment that is to come in the future, the revealing out God's glory in us.

So first today we will look at,

THE GROANING OF CREATION (Romans 8:19-22)

Paul tells us nature, the created world, is groaning for the day of salvation. Verse 22, **"For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now."** The whole creation is groaning in expectation, like a woman who groans in labor pains until the glorious moment that her child is born. What is the creation waiting and groaning for? Verse 19 says, **"For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God."**

The created world is looking longingly, waiting eagerly with readiness. And what's it waiting for? Verse 19, **"The revealing of the sons of God,"** the unveiling of the sons of God.

Why does creation groan for our glory? Verse 20 tells us, **"For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope."**

The creation was subjected to frustration. When did this happen? When Adam and Eve fell into sin in the garden. Adam did not consult with the animal world nor did he involve the rest of creation in his decision to disobey God. Innocent though it was, all creation suffers the backwash of Adam's sin. Creation suffers not only due to the initial sin of Adam, but creation also suffers from the on-going sin of mankind. Pollution is but one evidence of man's sin which causes the suffering and groaning of creation.

Listen, I'm glad for people who want to be good stewards of this earth. I'm all for conserving the earth's resources and treating nature nicely. But environmentalists can't rescue this cursed earth, ultimately. That awaits the return of Christ and remaking of the heavens and the earth.

God's judgment on Adam included a judgment on creation (Gen. 3:17b-18a): **"Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you."**

In other words, when sin entered the world it has a cosmic effect. The entire creation was thrown out of balance when mankind sinned. Because of Adam's sin the ground was cursed, thorns came upon the earth and the harmony, beauty and splendor of God's perfect creation was tarnished. Just as creation's splendor and majesty display the splendor and majesty of God (see Psalm 19), so creation's corruption and futility bear witness to man's sin.

John Piper points out that *"the meaning of all the misery in the world is that sin is horrific. All natural evil is a statement about the horror of moral evil. If you see a suffering in the world that is unspeakably horrible, let it make you shudder at how unspeakably horrible sin is against an infinitely holy God."*

Do you ever wonder about natural disasters like hurricanes, tornados, floods, and earthquakes? Do you wonder why God allows such things? These things are the result of the frustration of nature that came about as a result of mankind's sin.

Do you wonder why even the animal world seems so vicious? The Bible teaches that this is not natural. Violence and death, even in the animal kingdom, are the result of the curse on man's sin. Death was not a part of the original creation, which God pronounced as good. And in the future, when believers receive the full redemption that has been promised in Christ, all of creation will be restored at least to its original state, if not to an even greater level of glory. Isaiah 11 gives us a picture of what it will be like in the kingdom of heaven,

6 "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, The leopard shall lie down with the young goat, The calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little child shall lead them.

7 The cow and the bear shall graze; Their young ones shall lie down together; And the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

8 The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den.

9 They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord As the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:6-9)

When the effects of sin are removed from our world, the animal world will not longer be predatory. I think this shows us what the world was like before sin entered it. This is what the world was meant to be. Sin has disrupted this world that God has created.

But notice that the groaning of nature is like that of labor. It is painful, it is difficult, but it is also expectant, it is hopeful. Why does a mother ever have a second child? It is because of the pay off. A mother will endure the labor of delivery in exchange for the joy they anticipate from the child they will hold in their arms.

In the same way the creation endures the present subjection in the confidence and hope of a glorious rebirth of God's creation. The Bible tells us that the earth will be purified through fire (1 Peter 3: 7,11,12); there will be a new Heaven and a new earth (2 Peter 3:13; Rev. 21:1-15) and then there will be a great harmony or harmonization of nature.

When redeemed and perfected men rule with Christ, the earth will not suffer; it will prosper. The creation awaits its own day of redemption in hope, for God will bless the earth through the rule of men just as He presently causes the creation to share in the curse as the result of sin. Just as men, once enslaved by sin, are set free by the work of our Lord, so the earth, once enslaved due to sin, will be set free.

THE GROANING OF CHRISTIANS (Romans 8:23-25)

Creation is not the only thing that is groaning. The believer groans as well. Verse 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.”**

Like the creation, we who have been justified by faith suffer and groan. Our groaning is due to the present corruption and futility we see both within us and without. Sin, dwelling in our flesh and in this fallen world, causes us to groan. The contrast between what we presently are and what we shall be someday as adopted sons intensifies our groaning. At this future time, our bodies will be redeemed. Our earthly bodies, subject to corruption and to sin, will be put away, and we will be given redeemed bodies free from sin, corruption, and death (verse 23, see also 1 Corinthians 15:35-58; 2 Corinthians 5:1-4). At this time we will receive our full inheritance as sons and reign with Christ over all creation.

Paul tells us that right now we only have a taste of what is to come. Paul said God has given us the firstfruits of his Spirit. The firstfruits are the very first of the crop from the field that become ripe and ready to eat. The firstfruits are the assurance that there is a good harvest to come. In Ephesians we are told that the Spirit is given as a deposit that guarantees our inheritance. What we sense, taste and know now is only a foretaste of what is to come. This taste makes us yearn and groan for more.

Paul tells us that we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons. Admittedly that seems confusing because we just saw in the paragraphs before this that we have already, through faith in Christ, been adopted as sons of God.

Paul says we are waiting for the resurrection of the body. The Bible tells us that as Jesus was resurrected in a real body, likewise we will have a real resurrected body as well. We will not be a disembodied spirit floating around but we will have new, perfect, healthy bodies that will not decay and through which we can honor the Lord throughout all eternity. It is hard to imagine this kind of body. Just as our present body is suited to our present existence, so our new body will be perfectly suited to our life in the kingdom of heaven.

We groan with aches and pains in this life. Our hearts flutter, our organs fail, our muscles atrophy. At times our earthly bodies rebel and maverick cells attack healthy cells resulting in various forms of cancer and acquired immune diseases. But there is coming a day when we will be set free. There is coming a day when we will be set free from sin, from its effects, and from the limitations of our earthly bodies.

THE GROANING OF GOD’S SPIRIT (Romans 8:26-27)

The presence of the Holy Spirit in each believer is the source not just of groaning but the source also of great comfort. This ministry of the Spirit Paul explains in verses 26 and 27.

26 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

27 Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

We are going to look at this passage in greater detail next week, but we must touch on it today. Just as the creation longs for the new creation and we long for the redemption of our bodies, so the Holy Spirit is within us also yearning for God's will to be done in our life. The Spirit prays for us. When we are without words, the Spirit is not. When we are confused, the Spirit sees clearly.

CONCLUSIONS

Let me suggest two things we should take away from this passage. First, we need to understand that groaning is natural. Life hurts. The seeming arbitrary nature of suffering sometimes doesn't make sense.

When we stand at the gravesite of a child or watch someone suffer from a devastating disease we can't help but cry out, "God this is not the way it is supposed to be!" And God's message to us in Romans 8 is, "You're right. This is not the way it is supposed to be." When we cry out, "God, then do something." He says, "I have and I will."

When you see the horrible things of life rather than despair, groan. Yearn for the better day. Look beyond the suffering to the day when that suffering will end forever.

Second, we must not give up. The thing that sustains us is hope, the unshakeable confidence that God's promises are true. Our hope is sure because the one who promised is faithful. Our hope of eternal life is sure because Jesus has risen from the grave and He will raise us as well.

What if we deliberately thought more about Heaven? What if we imagined the new body that will someday be ours? What if we imagined looking in a mirror and seeing nothing we wanted to change? What will it be like to have the aches and pains replaced by the joy of life? What will it be like to be able to live and enjoy without the fear of disease, death and decay?

Imagine a world where there was no dread of natural disasters and where the lion and lamb were able to play together. What if we put our focus on the reunion with those we love?

What if we dreamt more about the future day of resurrection when we will be glorified in the presence of Jesus our Savior?

I'll tell you what would happen. Our life would be transformed as we groan for the future. We would have a new perspective, a new joy, and a new purity. The troubles of this world would no longer seem insurmountable instead they would merely be annoying speed bumps on the road to Heaven.