

Romans, Part 38 8:18-27 4-23-23

Groans & Glory

We engage this morning with a passage that is intricate and beautiful. My attempt is to cover all ten verses. It is a painfully brief treatment so let's get right to it. **18-27** *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.* ¹⁹*For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly 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 also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.* ²²*For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.* ²³*And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.* ²⁴*For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees?* ²⁵*But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.* ²⁶*In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words;* ²⁷*and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.*

If I Corinthians 13 is the love chapter and Hebrews 11 is the faith chapter, then this, Romans 8, would have to be the groan chapter. The word “groan” or “groaning” occurs seven times in the New Testament. Three of those in our short passage for today. I have never preached a whole sermon on groaning – but I guess that changes today.

Last time we ended with verse 18, one of my favorite verses in all the Bible. It encourages us to deal with our sufferings, not by comparing our trials to those of others, but by comparing our trials to the glorious future we are promised in the gospel. That relates to what is ahead for me personally. But Paul goes on here to speak of what is ahead for the entire created order. He speaks in verses 20, 21, and 22 of *creation*. In context, it is apparent that he does not include everything in “creation.” Angels aren't included. Humans aren't either. No – this idea of “creation” refers to the non-rational elements of the earth. But in this passage, these non-rational “natural” elements are personified and described as if they have human characteristics. Creation is depicted waiting on something and frustrated

until it arrives. Indeed, verse 19 refers to the anxiety and eager longing of the creation. Verse 20 speaks of its futility. Verse 21 of its slavery to corruption, and then verse 22 says the whole creation groans and suffers. I won't pretend that I have this all figured out, but I do see some obvious concepts to bring to our attention,

First, then we look at creation groaning. But this is not just general groaning. It is a specific type according to verse 22. It is the groaning of travail or childbirth. And the point being made is that the groaning anticipates some kind of happy ending. And like any mother in labor, the hope is that the ending would hurry up and get here. Travail is a long period of pain, that yields to the bliss of a newborn in your arms. The woman with pain becomes a mother with child. So, Paul is saying that labor pains provide a metaphor of the end of the world. The present is uncomfortable, but it is bearable because of what we anticipate in the future. Hope energizes us for the struggle.

But, before we look at what is ahead, let's look back. How did the creation get into this unhappy state? Isaiah gives us some insight Isaiah 24:**4-6a** *The earth mourns and withers, the world fades and withers, the exalted of the people of the earth fade away.* ⁵*The earth is also polluted by its inhabitants, for they transgressed laws, violated statutes, broke the everlasting covenant.* ⁶*Therefore, a curse devours the earth, and those who live in it are held guilty.* Do you see the pointing finger? It is pointing at us. Human beings were appointed by God as caretakers and guardians of creation. Genesis 2:**15** (NLT) *The Lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it.* Oops! Did we do very good at this? I should say not. Instead, we violated the simple law of God and fell under a curse. But with us, what else got cursed? The entirety of creation. You notice in our text that Paul says the creation was subjected to futility unwillingly. Against its will. It is a victim of human corruption. Here is what God says to Adam after his sin. Genesis 3:**17c-18a** *Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life.* ¹⁸*Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you.* So, creation is now cursed, fallen. Not as originally designed. Thorns, thistles, mosquitoes, tornadoes, earthquakes. You name it. Scripture connects all the negative stuff back to human sin. What caused the hurricane? Was it global warming? Maybe, maybe not. But it definitely results from cosmic rebellion against God. Natural evil comes from moral evil. People wonder, *Oh, did I get cancer because I sinned?* I can't say for sure. That is possible – think of Sodom - but that is not how it usually works. It may be that you got sick because of some sin you commit, but also you may have gotten cancer because you are living righteously in a broken world. But in a broken

world, rotten stuff happens to everybody. And we certainly have a broken world. How does CS Lewis describe our situation in the Chronicles of Narnia? He says of Narnia that, under the curse of the white witch it was always winter, but never Christmas. What a great line! Always winter, but never Christmas. Thank God that is not the end of the story.

Well, let's look now at the end of the story for the creation. Verse 18 speaks of a coming glory. Verse 20 speaks of hope. Then we read in verse 21 *the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God*. And all the earth-lovers said? Amen! There will be a restoration of humanity and, accompanying that, a restoration of the created order. Let's let the Scriptures speak. Matthew 19:28 (NLT) *Jesus replied, "I assure you that when the world is made new and the Son of Man sits upon his glorious throne, you who have been my followers will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel*. Did you get that? When the world is made new. There are Scriptures that suggest the world is going to be destroyed, and there are Scriptures that say it will be restored. I think what is conveyed is that God will devastate what is, but then, out of the ashes, as it were, He will build something glorious. II Peter speaks this way. II Peter 3:10 *The day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up*. 13 *But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells*. And what will the creation be like then? The prophets try to provide some vision for that. Isaiah 65:25 *The wolf and the lamb will graze together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox; and dust will be the serpent's food. They will do no evil or harm in all My holy mountain," says the Lord*.

A quick word to my young friends in church today. One of the cool things adult love about being your parents and your friends is that we get to watch you discover all the great things this world has to offer. We enjoy watching you react to your first bite of ice cream. We enjoy watching you thrill over the beach or over the softness of the snow. But parents too can get very worried about the dangerous animals and the slippery ice and the fires. This world is a mixture, but it is far, far, from being as wonderful and cool as the new earth that is coming. Lots of great things now – yes, but nothing compared to what awaits us in the glory when you can ride a dolphin on the river which will be 84 degrees all year round. Something like that. God guarantees. Right now – the pains of childbirth are part of life on earth. Someday – rapturous delight.

So, our first two points – creation groaning and then creation glorified. Paul speaks of waiting for the glory with patience. This teaching is to produce patience. Perseverance, fueled by hope. The devil will tell you it is all vanity. But God says that history is going somewhere – and that somewhere includes the restoration of all things. Lewis again – in the Narnia Chronicles says that when the curse of the witch is lifted by the return of the great Lion – what starts to happen? People notice the ice is melting. Winter is yielding to Spring. Spring is something I never appreciated until I moved here. But now I get the excitement of it all. The cold death of winter, gives way to the warmth and life of spring. This is an apt picture of what is ahead for our planet. Now creation is groaning. Then creation is glorified.

Next, we see how these things apply to the individual Christian. Because what happens on the level of creation happens to us as well. What does verse 23 have to say? **23** *but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.* I have to give you the NLT here as well. It takes liberties, but I think they are justified. **23** (NLT) *And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us.* Lots of good news there, but it is mostly future isn't it? Right now, what are we doing? Groaning! Now, there are two reasons why we groan. The first is because we are trapped in decaying, weak bodies. The law of entropy applies to us too. By nature now, we fall apart. We break down. One of the problematic portions of verse 23 is that it says we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons. Just a few verses back we were claiming that we are already adopted. The NLT I think gets it just right. One of our adoption rights is a new body, but that is part of the inheritance. We don't get that just yet. Someday our bodies will be redeemed. Someday. Implication? Not today. Sorry. 2 Corinthians 5:**2** (NLT) *We grow weary in our present bodies, and we long to put on our heavenly bodies like new clothing.* **4** (NLT) *While we live in these earthly bodies, we groan and sigh.* This explains too what it means when it says the creation longs to see the revealing of the children of God. Fact is that a certain portion of the human race is in God's family. That is an extraordinary thing – but it is also an invisible thing. I can't tell by looking whether you are a child of God or not. I can't. Some people claim they can. I don't buy it. Our visible part is our still-fallen, unredeemed part. You have not seen Redeemed Dan yet. I am going to be spectacular – just you wait. Now I have the spirit of adoption – someday I get the body of adoption to go

with it. So, we see again that redemption comes in stages. I hope you can see what this says about physical healing and health. God's word does not say we are promised continual health. Nope. It may be that God sometimes does miracles of healing. When He does, we fall down and worship. But it is just not to be expected that we will escape physical decay and physical weakness and physical suffering in this life. Paul would have been a man covered with scars. And then he spoke of a constant thorn in the flesh, which, due to HIPPA laws, we don't know much about. But he asked God to take it away and the Lord said, *No, we are going to leave that there to keep your special revelations from making you proud.* So, Paul was one with us in this longing to inherit a new body in which we can enjoy the new earth. And consider this, - the guarantee of redeemed bodies is made possible by the certainty of God's salvation. Romans 8 makes no sense if you read it as one who believes our salvation from God can be lost. It is all about our assurance. It tells us we have a confident hope. What did the last verse of chapter six promise us? Romans 6:**23** *The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* John 3:16 says if we believe we have eternal life. Now – let me ask you this – for how long do we get eternal life? You see the point? You see the problem with saying eternal life can be lost? If it is lost, it was, by definition not what? Eternal. We will say more in the weeks ahead about this great teaching on the certainty of our inheritance in Christ. But for sure we see that we who love Christ have a confident hope of our finished redemption. **23-25** *We ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.* ²⁴*For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees?* ²⁵*But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.* So, this is the application. Wait for it with eagerness. We don't dread it. I can't say I enjoy the increasing frailty of my earthly body, but this much I know – every day I get closer to the new and better one. So, with a realistic outlook we place our hope in the promise of God which is to yield patience and perseverance in the fight. Our future hope fuels us, strengthens us for the present conflict with its inherent sadness and suffering. When we hope and exult in God we will not yield to temptation. For now, let's remember this first type of groaning – which is the groaning due to having a fallen physicality that longs for renewal.

The second groaning that Paul mentions in these few verses is quite different. It is groaning in the context of prayer. **26-27** *In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words;* ²⁷*and He who*

searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. The apostle Paul, of all people, says we don't always know how to pray. Well, I find some comfort in that. As a pastor, I am in position all the time to pray for others and I often begin by saying, *Help me Lord*. It is not obvious to me how to pray. When my mother was 92 and saying she wanted to die, I wasn't sure how to pray. When I meet someone who has had a disability for twenty years, do I pray for healing or patient endurance? Well, what do you do when you don't know what to do? You pray about it. So, you even pray about your praying. I often begin by calling on the Spirit's aid. He is the one who helps us in our weakness. In the gospel of John Jesus called the Spirit our *paraclete* – the one who comes alongside to help us. As we intercede for others, He intercedes for us. Indeed, Scripture says we have two intercessors when we pray. Jesus is the mediator before the throne of heaven. The Holy Spirit assists us in our hearts. Prayer is this extraordinary display of the Trinitarian mystery. We pray to the Father, by the merits and intercession of the Son, through the leading of the Spirit. Romans 11:**36** *from Him and through Him and to Him are all things*. It is a beautiful thing that we can only understand in part.

Thankfully, understanding is not required for effective prayer. What is? Come on. What is required? Well, the Spirit of God. Remember what we saw last time. We pray to the Father and the Spirit of adoption gives us a heart to cry what? *Abba!!* This is where my heart goes. In my groanings I turn to God and say *Abba, Daddy, Father, Help your troubled son*. And part of how He helps is in prayer. The Spirit intercedes with groanings. So, creation groans, we groan, the Spirit groans through us. I believe the idea is that we do the groaning, but the Spirit inspires the groanings. What are those groaning? Some will want to see this as glossolalia, the speaking in unknown tongues, but I don't think that is the idea here. Paul speaks of that elsewhere. I don't dismiss that, but speaking in tongues involves using words – Paul says this kind of prayer is beyond words. Clearly, I hope you see that real praying happens in the spiritual realm at a deep level and is entirely different than saying a prayer. Certainly it has nothing to do with lighting a candle or reciting something by rote. Oh my no! This is deep calling unto deep. This is Hannah in the temple crying *Lord give me children or I die*. This is David in the wilderness calling on God to avenge him before his enemies, including his own son. This is Elijah asking God to defend him before the prophets of Baal. This is Jesus in the garden sweating blood. My mind went back to the summer of 1989. In April of that year our fourth child, Sharon, was born with a cleft lip that would require surgery. Seven weeks later, our Sarah was flown by helicopter to a hospital

in Orlando where she spent two weeks in ICU with acute lymphocytic leukemia – the start of three years of intense chemotherapy. Just a month later Beth's back went out and she could hardly function at all. When Sharon had her surgery to fix her lip, I was wheeling Beth around the hospital in a wheelchair. Our baby had weights on her arm and she was crying nonstop. I remember leaving the hospital and driving home. Somehow I was alone and by the time I got to Palm Bay Road and I-95 I just totally lost it. I was crying out to God and I began to wail. Words were nowhere to be found. But there were groanings a plenty – load groanings. I pulled my car over and just yielded to the Spirit of God who cried out on my behalf with groanings too deep for words. And after working my way through a box of Kleenex I was able to go home to the other kids and persevere. In those groanings of soul, in my overwhelmedness, the Spirit of the Lord met me, helped me and prayed for me in ways I could never have devised on my own. Thank God for the ministry of the Spirit. Thank God that he is the Spirit of Adoption. Thank God for His intercession, so necessary for groaning Christians, waiting patiently and eagerly for our glorification in his time.

- I. Creation groaning – broken and cursed
- II. Creation glorified – destroyed and restored
- III. Christians groaning – unredeemed bodies
- IV. Christians glorified – perfected bodies
- V. The Holy Spirit groaning – interceding for the saints