

## Romans 8:18-25

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Date: 18 October 2026

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[0:00] Please do open your Bibles back to Romans chapter 8. We're continuing the series and this! We'll be continuing over the next few evenings. We're verses 18 to 25 tonight. It's very easy! It's very easy to start something and not finish it, isn't it? We can start DIY projects or new workout routines or start a new hobby, but it's so easy just to give up and not finish them, isn't it? And one of the reasons is that we just don't think it's worth it. We weigh it up in the scales of our minds and think that the inconvenience, the faff, the effort is not worth the outcome. So think about cross-country in school. So everyone has these dreaded memories of cross-country, don't they? Remember the cold January mornings and the rain and the mud and your lungs wheezing and the lactic acid burn? And what is so often the case in those races? You just give up. Stop running, sit out on the side or you just walk the rest. And why do we give up? Because we don't think the pain is worth it. We weigh up in the scales of our minds that the pain and suffering of our lungs and our legs now. And then we put on the other side what we're going to get at the finish line, maybe the PE teacher saying, well done, maybe just the joy of having depleted it, being stronger and faster. And we weigh both up and we tell ourselves, well, the finish line, it just isn't worth it.

The pain is too big, so we just give up. Well, in this passage today, Paul is telling us the Christian life is a bit like that. There is suffering and there is pain and it is difficult running the race of the Christian life. Paul fully acknowledges that, just like we saw this morning, that the battle, the trials, the agony. But he's also showing us what lies ahead at the finish line. In this passage, he's kind of zooming out, showing us the whole race of the Christian life and giving us a preview of the finish line. He looks ahead to that glory and he puts both in the weighing scales and he's telling us the suffering now is so small in comparison to the huge weight of glory to come.

In fact, they're not even worth comparing. Look at verse 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.

You weigh up suffering now versus glory later and glory just completely shatters the weighing scales. As we run this race and we feel the pain and whatever suffering you may be experiencing right now, God is telling us today the glory to come is worth it. It outweighs everything you are going through.

And part of the reason why Romans 8 is such a wonderful chapter is that Paul is showing us why this glory is so weighty. And he does this by showing us that the story of salvation, the work of the Spirit, is far bigger than we can see. So far in Romans, we've been seeing that the work of the Spirit is deeper than we can see. He's working far deeper in each of our lives than we realize. But also, the work of the Spirit is far bigger and wider than we realize. Paul takes us to the finish line. We glimpse into the glory that awaits us and we see the Spirit's work goes beyond saving individuals. And actually, the Spirit's work is cosmic. Salvation involves the whole creation, the whole universe. And the reason why the glory that awaits us is so worth it is that the Spirit is about to free the whole creation. God's plan and the Spirit's work, it is far, far bigger than we can see.

[4:46] But what is even more glorious is that the church and your life lies at the very heart of this cosmic plan. And so the race you are in, life in the Spirit, it is so, so worth it.

And so I want us to go to the glory side of the weighing scales and I want us to see God's cosmic plan. And I want us to see this, my first point today, creation is waiting for freedom. Creation is waiting for freedom. Look at verse 19. Paul jumps into why the glory to come is so worth it. Verse 19, for, because the creation waits with eager longing. By creation, he means everything created. The world, the earth, the sky, the universe, the galaxies, all creation is waiting for something. It's like the universe is on the edge of its seats, looking at the clock, tapping away, on the edge, waiting. And what is it waiting for? Verse 19, for the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. And by sons of God, he means us, Christians, the church. Remember from this

morning, we are children of God. We are adopted into his family. But at the moment, it doesn't look like it.

Deep inside, the spirit is doing powerful work in us. We are radically different on the inside. Resurrection life beats inside of you. We are sons of God. But to compare the church and the world outwardly, it doesn't look like we are sons of God. We are frail and weak. Our bodies waste away. We get the same diagnosis, same injuries. If you go to a graveyard and you never read the headstone, you couldn't tell which mound of dirt belonged to a Christian or a non-Christian.

[7:02] It is not obvious that we are children of God. The spirit's power is hidden and deep inside, working in your heart. But it's not yet revealed. And so the creation is waiting for the revealing of the sons of God. And what is this revealing? Look at the end of verse 23. We wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. Now, we are currently adopted. In Christ, you are right now and always a loved child of God. But there's another stage to our adoption. There is a now and a not yet to our salvation.

When Christ returns on that final day and raises our bodies from the grave to immortal life, never to die again, that is when what is hidden inside of you will now be revealed. The resurrection life inside of you now will be resurrection life on the outside of you. In your glorious, imperishable body, it will then be obvious.

And for all to see that you are a child of God. God's glory and grace will shine forth through your resurrection like no other.

And Christ's return will be the revealing of the sons of God. And so creation is on the edge of its seat, eagerly waiting for your resurrection.

And why? Why is the universe waiting for that of all things? Well, it's because the creation is currently trapped. Look at verse 20. For because the creation was subjected to futility. Now, the word futility here, it means frustrating emptiness.

[9:13] It's the same word as vanity in Ecclesiastes. Remember, vanity, vanity, everything is vanity. Ever since the fall, creation is not functioning as it should be. Its purpose has been distorted. Its design has been disordered.

And we experience that every day. We have so many hopes for our lives, all these expectations and plans for the future, but it all just gets frustrated.

Life in this creation, it doesn't go where we want it to. We get moments of joy and fulfillment, but they just pass so quickly.

And then we just meet another roadblock. Well, that is the curse creation is under, futility. And look at verse 21. It's in bondage to corruption.

Corruption. Corruption means decay and brokenness. We often use the word corrupted when files on our computer get corrupted, don't we?

[10:21] I'm really no computer expert, but when files get corrupted, the original data, it's basically there, but it's damaged. And it's all out of order and mashed up. It gets warped.

And then it becomes this useless, unreadable mess. Or think of when food gets corrupted. It degrades and rots and stinks. Well, that is like creation.

Creation was made very good, but now that good has been corrupted. There is disease. There is disaster. There's death. And so creation is in bondage to this corruption.

It's trapped and enslaved in this brokenness. In the fall, the curse of sin struck. And the bars went up around our hearts, but also the bars went up around creation.

And creation is waiting and waiting and longing and longing for the revealing of the sons of God, because that is when it will be released from its bondage.

[11:35] And why? Why is creation waiting for humanity? Well, creation fell with man in the beginning.

And so creation will be raised with man in the end. Think back to Genesis. Humanity, Adam, caused this corruption. We are rulers over this creation, dominion over it.

And so when humanity rebelled against God, we all fell into the prison cell of sin, and creation fell with us. We aren't tied to creation.

Creation is tied to us. And so if it fell with us, it will be raised with us. Our resurrection will be the cause of creation's freedom.

And Christ is leading this charge. His resurrection paved the way to this freedom, broke through that corruption, and so his return, it's going to trigger it.

[12:43] And so when we are revealed as sons of God, outwardly, fully, free in glory, creation is going to share in that. Verse 21.

The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

And so what is creation doing now? Waiting. The world is waiting for you, Christian, to be glorified. In fact, it's groaning. Verse 22. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

When we're in pain, we groan, don't we? So your toddler headbutts you in the stomach. You don't smile. You groan. I've got the experience of that.

[13:41] We groan when something isn't right. Well, right now, creation is groaning in pain. And you can hear it.

The drought this summer, that was creation groaning. That huge flash flood in Nepal and Tibet, that was creation groaning.

And think of the wars going on right now. With every bullet, with every ballistic missile, those are the sounds of groans. COVID.

Malaria. TB. Smallpox. Creation has been groaning for millennia. We can't stand, we hate that word, cancer.

Well, creation groans over it too. Every time a cell mutates or DNA gets damaged, that is creation groaning. And you can't escape it.

[14:45] It's there in the hospitals, the hospices. It's in the park, in the streets. We can hear and feel those groans. But notice that these are not groans of pointless pain.

So if you were to snap a ligament in your knee, you groan, don't you? But it's groans of purposeless pain. That pain isn't leading anywhere.

It's not good pain, directionful pain. You leave that injury and it's just going to get worse. It's just bad groans. But creation has different groans, verse 22.

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. These are groans of birth pains.

Creation is in labor. And something is about to appear. Groans of something amazing to come. I remember when Bethany was in labor with our first, with Lydia.

[15:54] My job, my only job, was talking her through the pain. And she'd even give me some cue cards that she'd written during the pregnancy. Cue cards to say the right thing.

And I'm not ashamed of saying that. If you say the wrong thing, that is a dangerous thing. So cue cards to say the right thing. And some of the things that I would say to her were, keep going. These contractions are normal.

Don't worry. The pain means you're making progress. This is going somewhere. You're going to see the baby soon. You're going to see the baby soon. And for the mothers here, you know it is a different type of pain, isn't it?

It's a big pain, but it's purposeful. It's leading somewhere. Well, that is like the groans of creation. It's hopeful pain.

Look at verse 20. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free.

[16:57] God cursed this world, but he did so with a hope, a plan. That all this will lead to something glorious, a glorified new creation.

When creation will be set free from corruption and disease and disaster and futility, it will be released to what we know this world should be, glorious.

And this is key to God's plan of salvation. Eternal life. It's not about escaping this world. Not a floating future in the sky, but a physical world.

Walking here on earth, living on this planet. But this planet freed from corruption. On the day that we are raised, we will get to walk on the soil of this earth, but without the prison bars around us. No fear of landslides. No worries about what pandemic is coming next. No more frustration with your home and those leaks and those breaks.

[18:05] No more worry about food or where AI is going to take us or the economy or politicians. Tiger enclosures will never make the headlines again.

But the world will be as it should be, perfect. We get tiny, pale glimpses of it now.

Those moments when we just think, this is the life. Well, it will be like that, but infinitely greater and forever. In C.S. Lewis's *The Great Divorce*, he tells the story of basically someone visiting the new creation.

And it's a bit imaginative, but he has some great moments that really capture how much better, greater the world to come will be. The main character, I remember this moment, the main character says he tries to pluck a daisy, but he can't because it's so solid and heavy.

It feels like diamond. And as he stands on the grass, the grass passes through his feet. And he says he feels like a phantom.

[19:16] But not because the grass is dangerous, but because the world is now so much more real. And I think that really captures the glory to come.

The world we're living in right now, it's like a phantom, a ghost, compared to the eternal, solid reality. The glory of what the world to come will be like.

So you put the two on the scales, the groans of this world now, and the freed creation to come, and there's just simply no comparison. The Spirit's work, it's so much bigger than we realize.

He's begun the renewal in your heart right now, this moment. But he's about to renew the entire universe. And so in your frustration with this world, if you are here and you are thinking that this world isn't right, and you hear the groans and it is agonizing, and yes, we must be thankful for lots of good things.

God is so merciful in our lives, but you know the world should be so much better. And life does seem futile. It doesn't go as we hope, and you keep hitting those roadblocks.

[20:37] Well, here is the glorious news. This isn't all there is. We are on the way to something far greater, and the finish line is glorious.

And what is even better is that you can be a part of it. This is God's cosmic plan, and we, his people, we are a part of it.

In fact, we are at the center of it. Because as creation waits for freedom, it's waiting for us. And what are we waiting for?

We wait for redeemed bodies. That's my second and final point today. We are waiting for redeemed bodies. There's another groan amongst all this.

Did you notice? Verse 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.

[21:44] We don't just hear the groans of this futility. We join it. This world is not only frustrated. We are frustrated.

And so what are we waiting for? So what is the answer we are longing for? The redemption of our bodies. Our bodies are the source of so much frustration, aren't they?

And sometimes we do literally groan. With age, you can actually hear it. But when you go down to bend down to pick something up, or you get off a chair, and you groan, don't you?

It's the groans of a failing body. It's the frustration of our bodies not moving like they're 16 anymore. But often, the frustration doesn't need to be audible.

You walk around with chronic back pain, and you just quietly live with that frustration and groaning every day. The arthritis. The arthritis. You groan with that frustration that this is not what life should be.

[22:53] Those injuries on the sports field, that they're more than painful. You groan with the frustration of the fallen corruption of our bodies. As our eyesight and hearing goes.

As our minds and our memories lose their sharpness, that the neural pathways just not functioning. Or the chemicals in our bodies, that the hormones going out of balance, we groan.

That diagnosis that throws our families and our lives up in the air. We cry, we weep, and we groan. And of course, the greatest pain of all, when death strikes.

And we have to say those goodbyes. We grieve, and we bear a pain beyond words. Those are the groans of longing for something more.

And we are right to groan. Not grumble, not complain to God. But it is right to groan. To recognize our bodies do matter.

[23:58] We are made body and soul. And to recognize this isn't right. But what is unique to a Christian's groaning is that we groan with a hope.

Verse 23. We groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons. The redemption of our bodies. For in this hope, we were saved.

These groans we have are the cries for a resurrection we know is coming. We have the first fruits of the Spirit.

Resurrection life is hidden inside. But we are longing for it to be revealed. And the glorious hope of the Christian life is that it is coming.

That the risen Lord Jesus and the Spirit who raised him, the Spirit who now dwells in you, they guarantee this day is coming for you.

[24 : 57] And so your pains and your suffering and the agony you are going through right now, it is not pointless. It is leading somewhere. Just like the pain of giving birth, the groans of your life are not empty cries.

You don't suffer in vain. No, you are heading somewhere. And Christian, you need to know the pain now is nothing compared to when you open your eyes on that final day.

And the Spirit raises you. And you emerge from your grave. And your hearing has never been clearer. You hear the restored creation like never before.

And you take in that first breath with a perfect heart and perfect lungs. And your joints move with no pain. And your muscles perform like never before.

And your mind isn't your enemy but your peaceful friend. And with perfect vision, you see your Savior come back down to earth. And your restored eyes take in all his glory.

[26 : 06] And you see the family of God around you. Exactly how they should be. And now you know, fully revealed, we are the sons of God.

You can't even compare. But what is so hard is that we don't see it now. It is our hope. But look at verse 24.

Hope that is seen is not hope. We're waiting for something that we can't see yet. We're waiting for our Savior coming over the horizon. But we don't see him yet.

It's hope. But it is a sure and certain hope. Just like we don't see the full reality of what the Spirit is doing in our life.

It's deeper and bigger than we can see. But the Spirit is there. Well, glory is there. It's coming. And if that is our hope, what do we need to do?

[27 : 05] Verse 25. If we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Brothers and sisters, we need to wait with patience.

In the pain, it feels like the race will never end. But don't give up. The Lord has not forgotten you. There is a finish line. It's only a short few years until you have an eternity of glory.

A glory that is so, so worth it. And all we have to do is wait. You don't need to try hard for it.

You don't need to earn it. You just need to wait patiently. Trusting in the Lord. Trusting him with your pain and suffering. Trusting him with all the frustrations of this life.

Trust that he will come and he will redeem us. And trust that his spirit that is inside of you now is powerful enough to free even creation itself.

[28 : 12] Wait for him by trusting him. And if you aren't a Christian here today, whatever frustration or suffering that you are going through right now, we all know that this life and our bodies, they aren't the way it should be.

And we know our pain, it needs an answer. And you might be looking for hope right now. Wishing, just wishing that there was a way out of this.

Well, there is. But you don't need to wish for it anymore. You just need to wait. Come and put your trust in the Lord Jesus, the one who has conquered the grave and is leading his people to glory.

Trust in him and you don't need to wish for something better. You are guaranteed to have something incomparably glorious. It is yours to have.

You just need to come and join the wait. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

[29 : 24] A short few years now, but an eternity to come. Pain now, but blissful joy in the future. The Lord is coming back for his family.

We just need to wait with patience. And the glory to come, it is so, so worth it. Let's pray.