

Romans 8:18-25

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[0 : 00] Romans chapter 8. I'm sorry, you just have to wait. We've all been there, haven't we? We've finally succumbed and phoned up NHS Direct or we've finally taken ourselves off down to A&E; to queue up.

The pain has gotten so bad that we've had to do something about it. Only to hear those words, you just have to wait.

How do you feel when you hear that? I suppose it could be frustrating, couldn't it? Or it could be encouraging. I suppose it depends on your perspective when you are in pain.

The story goes of two captives trapped in two towers. Each had a window in his own cell. But over the years the two prisoners grew further and further apart. They became more and more different. One became more and more depressed and the other became more and more cheerful. The difference was that the first prisoner would spend each night looking out of his window, staring down at the ground beneath him, reliving his captivity, wallowing in his captivity.

[1 : 24] But the second would spend each night looking through his window and gazing up above the clouds in his tower at the stars, dreaming of a life to come.

It's often about our perspective, isn't it? And Paul teaches us in this passage tonight how to look out of the window of the prison of pain.

You just have to wait. And three things tonight. Futility, freedom and focus. We feel, I think, imprisoned by pain.

Waiting with pain. Why do we feel like that? The first thing tonight. We are living with futility. We are living with futility. Paul says we are living under bondage.

Imprisoned. Verse 20. The creation was subjected to futility. Verse 21. It waits for the freedom of its bondage.

[2 : 31] Creation, he says, is groaning under bondage. We ourselves, verse 23, our bodies are waiting for redemption, to be freed.

New Year's Day, it's a good day to look forward, isn't it? To think of new things. To look forward to new things. To escape the curse of 2016, as they call it.

But we will still be imprisoned by some things this year, won't we? Our circumstances don't magically change, just because it's January the 1st.

We're stuck with them, to some extent. Our bodies, frail, some of them. In discomfort.

Temperamental. We're stuck with them, too, aren't we? Our lives will be as frustrating at times as they were last year, this year.

[3 : 34] As disappointing at times as they were last year. This world, writhing, aggravated, under bondage.

Paul traces it back to the fall, doesn't he? God places Adam and Eve as the stewards of creation, as the kings of creation.

But the sin of those with most authority corrupts and affects most, doesn't it? A king's corruption spreads into the whole of his kingdom, doesn't it?

And those with most authority over the world. When the stewards fall, the whole creation falls and is affected. And that is what happens in Genesis 3.

As the crown of creation, Adam and Eve, fall. And they become the bane of creation's life. God subjects the creation to futility, to bondage.

[4 : 33] The word futility here, it's the same word in the book of Ecclesiastes. If you know that book, it's the Hebrew word hevel, which is not easy to translate into English.

Breath, or wind, or vanity. Meaningless. There's some translations. I'm not sure that's helpful. Ecclesiastes does not describe life as meaningless.

But as satisfying and yet tainted with frustration. Life is not what we always hope it to be. Our work is enslaved under bondage, isn't it?

To decay. Ambitions are thwarted. We're constrained by our lack of resources. We don't see the produce of our labour all of the time, do we?

In relationships, they are enslaved to the bondage of death. When we are separated with those that we love. Our children will one day live and enjoy life without us, won't they?

[5 : 41] Most of us in this room will be forgotten about in a hundred years' time. Our bodies fail. Aching tendons and sinews.

Headaches. Cracking joints at the end of the day. Tension and stress. This is life under futility.

In the prison that Paul describes here. Bradley Wiggins retired this week, didn't he? At 36. It's alright for some. The most highly decorated British athlete there ever was.

But his body cannot keep up. His body is showing signs of frustration. Of bondage to decay. And you can go to the doctors for a medical explanation for that.

You can go to the experts for an environmental or a social explanation for how the world is as it is. But this is the biblical explanation. That the world is in shackles.

[6 : 46] It is under bondage. Living in futility. And in many ways our culture is in denial about that, isn't it?

There have been so many celebrity deaths last year. It's brought the brevity of life into focus, hasn't it? But it's interesting how the media struggles to explain what is going on there.

What possible reason could there be for these people to die? They searched for rational explanations. George Michael, he was the life and soul of the party.

How could it be possible that he would die? People thought he would live forever. I heard someone saying on the radio yesterday, he had so many more albums in him.

She had so much more to give. And it's tragic, isn't it? But this is Havel. This is living in futility. And if some of us don't feel like that at the moment, we will.

[7 : 49] Won't we? And yet, if all we see is this futility, we are going to be very depressed people, aren't we? If your perspective goes no further than the prison walls, life will seem pretty hopeless to you.

If all you can see is the pain that you feel. If you are so fixated on that, that that dominates the whole of your life.

Living with futility. But Paul wants to teach us how to learn to look out of the window. Because secondly, the freedom. We are heading for freedom.

Just imagine for a moment that creation could speak. Creation had a voice. An audience with the grass on Drayton Green, if you like.

So we all sit there. And Drayton Green can talk to us. Or imagine your body could speak. That the joints in your body could talk to you.

[8 : 57] That your backache could talk to you. Paul says, they groan. They groan in the pains of childbirth.

Imagine Drayton Green groaning. What is it saying? Set me free. Set me free. Set me free. What is it groaning for?

How can it be free? Verse 19. Creation waits with eager longing for the revelation of the sons of God. It is ironic, isn't it?

That the king and queen of creation, Adam and Eve, God's vice regents, are the ones who have caused this futility.

And yet creation longs for humanity to set them free. To set it free. It longs for the sons of God.

[9 : 59] To set it free. More accurately, actually. It longs for rulers. It groans. Rule me. Rule me. Rule me.

I wonder if you know which street in the UK has the award for the best street. I wonder what you'd guess for that. It's Grey Street in Newcastle upon Tyne, actually.

It's got the best architecture in Britain. It's built in stone in the classical style. If you've not seen it, it's worth seeing. It sweeps down to the Tyne. And it's a brilliant street.

It's a beautiful street. It's a monument to the riches of the 18th century in Newcastle. But you don't want to see it after a weekend in Newcastle when there was no bin collection on Monday.

So there was a year, 15 years ago, where all of the bin collectors went on strike. And they went on strike the following Monday after that as well. And the streets were piled with two to three high piles

of bin bags, torn with food everywhere.

[11:09] There were pigeons everywhere. It was absolutely horrendous. The smell was terrible. And the streets longed to be ruled again.

They longed for the stewards to come back and to clean up and to bring order. That Grey Street called out and it cried out, rule me, rule me, rule me.

And so creation has a frustrated double relationship with mankind, hasn't it? It's got a love-hate relationship with mankind.

I found out this week, it's really interesting the way that sometimes the Old Testament talks about the exile. What is the exile? The exile is when people leave a land, isn't it?

So the Israelites are taken away from their land. It is the separation of human beings from creation.

[12:13] It is the separation of human beings who have responsibility for that land and they are removed from it. And it's an awful thing for the people to be removed from their land.

But listen to what the land says. Listen to what the land thinks when the people leave. Leviticus 26. Then the land shall enjoy its Sabbaths as long as it lies desolate.

While you, Israelites, are in your enemy's land, then the land shall rest and enjoy its Sabbaths. As long as it lies desolate, it shall have rest.

It's quite staggering that, isn't it? When will the land be at rest? When you leave human beings.

Humanity are the stewards of creation and yet they are the reason that creation is enslaved, you see.

There is this dual relationship with creation and mankind. Creation can't live with us and it can't live without us. There's that funny syndrome, Stockholm syndrome, isn't there?

[13:27] Where people who have been taken hostage start to love their captors. Have you heard about that? And in that situation they rely on their captors to give them life.

And so they start to love them and build up a relationship with them. It is an odd thing, isn't it?

Because that is no kind of life. It sort of works, but it's a life under bondage.

The hostages want to be close to them and yet they want to escape them at the same time. And so it's a love-hate relationship between mankind and creation.

It can't live with us and it can't live without us. And so the creation longs to be looked after. And it kind of works at the moment, but it is not how it's supposed to be.

It is not the life that your body is supposed to live. And so creation groans not for humanity to be wiped out, but it groans for a new humanity.

[14:41] Verse 21, it hopes to obtain the freedom of the children of God. See that? It doesn't hope just for humanity to just sort of pull its socks up and get better at looking after the planet.

It is longing, it is hoping for a renewed humanity. For a different humanity to come and rule over it. Not just any people, but God's children.

It groans for God's children. Rule me. Christians, rule me. Rule me. Rule me. Alan Titchmarsh has got that programme, Ground Force.

Have you seen it? It's sad that I know about this programme. But it shows, doesn't it, gardens that have been left for too long and they grow wild over time. There's an old sofa dumped at the back of the garden.

Just in a total mess. And Alan Titchmarsh, he sends in the Ground Force, doesn't he? The experts of gardening. And they clear it all out.

[15:49] They put decking there, they put flowers in, different grasses, fruit trees, fountains and goldfish. And it's great, isn't it? The Ground Force go in.

And that is what is going on here. Creation groans for the Ground Force. It groans for a new humanity. It groans for a family.

It's a lot of family language, isn't there? Obtaining the freedom of the children of God. We ourselves long for the adoption. The adoption.

Groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for the adoption of our sons. The redemption of our bodies. Lots of family language. The picture is when the father brings the children home.

And the children are like him. They are a renewed humanity. They are God-like children. A spirit-filled Ground Force.

[16:51] A spirit-filled family. And he brings his adopted children in. Imagine the old family home. It's been left. And no one's been there.

A stately home. And it's filled with God-like children again. Renewed, holy children. Botanists. Architects. Landscapes.

Engineers. Planners. Artists. Musicians. Cooks. And they come in and they fill the house. They clear away the cobwebs. They light the fires. They polish the floors.

They blow off the dust. The adopted children sharing in the property of the natural son, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, the son of God.

He is the God-man. And he leads his ground force. He is the second Adam. And so it is a reversal of the fall, isn't it?

[17:49] When the king is corrupted, the rot spreads to the whole of the creation, to the kingdom. But when a new human king appears, glorified with his family, with his brothers and sisters, their glory spreads to the whole of creation.

Their glory frees the creation. Our reading from Revelation 21, it describes the new heavens and the new earth.

And I think what's important to realise, it will be this earth, won't it? This earth set free. The word new in Revelation does not mean to start from scratch.

Kind of wipe everything away. Start again. It is to renew. It is to bring a cataclysmic change. But it will be this earth. It will still be recognisable as this earth.

But it will be profoundly different at the same time. It's not easy to think that through, is it? And as the first budding flower of this new creation, Jesus' resurrection body is a good illustration of that, isn't it?

[19:05] It is recognisable. Jesus' body with the marks in his hands. The same Jesus. The same Jesus. And yet glorified.

Freed from all pain. Immortalised. His body is indestructible. And as he steps onto the earth with his brothers and sisters, the family of God, the house of God will rule.

So Paul says, just wait for that. Living with futility. Heading for freedom. Thirdly and lastly, keeping focus on glory.

And I think this is where this passage really helps us. This short section in Romans 8, it begins and ends with Paul talking about perspective, doesn't it?

Verse 18, he considers present sufferings of the present time not worth comparing with future glory.

Verse 25, we hope for what we don't see.

[20:14] We wait for it with patience. He is trying to get us to address our perspective. To consider how we view our pain and our suffering and our futility.

Considering, that word considering, it is about reckoning. It is about deciding how to view things. How to view our circumstances.

How to view our bodily pain. Waiting with patience, at the end of verse 25 there, is an active word. It is to eagerly expect something. It is to look for it. To gaze out for it. To sort of grab hold of it in hope.

Some kinds of pain are easier to put up with than others, aren't they? Some pain feels pretty pointless. Why am I feeling like this? What is the point of this? But other pain is worth it, isn't it?

[21:20] You can deal with it better, knowing it's leading to something. I'm told childbirth is a bit like that. And creation groans like that.

We groan like that. It is having the perspective. It is realising that this futile world for the believer is pain.

But it is pain with a purpose. Verse 20. The creation was subjected to futility. And at the end of verse 20. In hope.

In hope. Boston Charles Street Jail used to be home to some of the city's worst criminals.

The most notorious characters. But during the 1960s the prison fell into disrepair. It sort of became a bit run down.

[22:16] It became overcrowded. There were riots there. And it was decommissioned. It was condemned in 1973. And the last inmates transferred out of there in 1990.

But 27 years later and \$150 million later. The Charles Street Jail has now been overhauled. And it's been converted to a luxury hotel.

You can get a room there for \$5,000. And this is the great bit. The hotel is called the Liberty Hotel. Designers celebrate the building's past.

So you can go to a restaurant in the Liberty Hotel called The Clink. And a bar called The Alibi. It's great isn't it? It's the same building.

It's the same street. But it's been completely overhauled. It's no longer a building for captives. But for the free. It's not for frustration.

[23 : 19] But for fun. Not for death. But for life. And this focus. Of seeing this.

In our future. As God's children. Is what Paul is wanting us to do. It is reckoning. That our bodies will be restored.

Amongst the family of God. It is realizing. And seeing that this world. In bondage to futility. Will be redeemed. And released.

And overhauled. And this creation. That was called frustrated. Will be called free. And seeing out of the prison of pain.

To the stars. It is seeing this. It is getting hold of that. As we wait. It is thinking about that.

[24 : 16] It is imagining that. Maybe. Just wait. For that. It's difficult to know. Isn't it? Exactly what it will be like. In the new heavens.

And the new earth. I think it's good to think about it. It's clear that it will be a physical place. It will be a physical place. It will be a physical place. This creation will be set free.

This world. But totally different. And we will rule there. With Jesus. We will reign with him. It will make your electric windows.

And your smartphone. Seem petty. Won't it? Your body as well. Will be strong again. And agile. And able. You will rule.

With Jesus. As the children of God. We might even. Dine in a restaurant. Called the clink. You've heard of. Bucket lists.

[25 : 14] 50 things to do. Before you die. Go on a roller coaster. Eat a steak. Go and see the rolling stones. Whatever. That's how the world thinks. Isn't it?

And there's some logic. To that. If this world. Is under. Futility. That is a good strategy. Isn't it? Get as much. Out of this world. As you can. Pour all of your resources.

Into this life. Get yourself. As healthy as you can. As painless as you can. I heard that.

Christchurch. Derby. Have started. Drawing up. A new bucket list.

101 things to do. After you die. Building. A building. Better than foster. Cook food. Better than Ramsey. Run faster.

Better than Farrah. Dance better than Bruttle. It would be good to draw up a list. Wouldn't it? Just wait. Just wait. Eastern religions.

[26 : 11] They have a funny idea about. What happens in the afterlife. It is interesting how they think. That we are sort of absorbed.

Into creation. That we're absorbed into the sunset. Sort of lose your body. And become part of the universe.

In some sort of unconscious. Spiritual soup. But I don't think that sounds attractive actually. The Bible's view is that. It will be bodily.

We won't turn into God himself. We won't just turn into a spirit. Who is omnipresent. And omniscient. And that is good.

We will enjoy creaturely enjoyment. We will enjoy being glorious. And yet still limited in some way. As creatures. We will still look at the sunset.

[27 : 10] And be consciously aware. That we are small. And we will say. Wow. Look at that. We will look at the mountains. In the new creation. And say. Wow. They declare.

The glory of God. And I don't think those moments. Will be gone. In the new creation. Our physicality. Will still let us feel that.

We'll still be blown away. By the view. Just wait. Just wait. This weekend.

I was listening to a sermon. By the black preacher. E.V. Hill. Now he is not someone. I normally recommend. Listening to. I like. You know. Some of his stuff is okay. But there's a sermon online.

Of his. And it's a sermon. That he preached. At his wife's funeral. It is probably one of the most. Electrifying sermons. That I've heard recorded. It is mesmerising.

[28 : 09] And listening to his vision. In immense pain. It is staggering. He begins his sermon. He says.

I'm experiencing two things. I'm experiencing tears. And I'm experiencing strength. A rare combination. The congregation.

Like this. I'm crying. And I'm getting stronger. And then he preaches. A great sermon. On Job 1. 21. Naked I came from my mother's womb.

And naked I shall return. The Lord gave. And the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. He ends his sermon. Picturing a conversation. Between him and God.

About his wife. And God says to him. You think she was pretty. Just wait. Until you see her again. Just wait. Just wait until you get out of this.

[29 : 08] Earthen vessel. And put on your garments. Just wait. Just wait until you see her. As she is. No more sickness. No more sorrow.

No more pain. Just wait. Just wait until we are caught up to meet him in the air. Just wait. Just wait until it's all over with.

Just wait. Just wait until I get through. Me doing an impression of that sermon. Is laughable really. But he is right. It is pain with a purpose.

And Paul says to us. Just wait. I consider that the sufferings of this present time. Aren't worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

So how are you looking out of the window at the beginning of this year? There will be things that excite us this year.

[30 : 08] There will be great things that happen to many of us. But there will be things that we're not looking forward to this year. There will be things that we're dreading. And things that we don't relish the thought of.

But we can all look forward to this. Can't we? That one day the creation which was subjected to futility.

Will be set free from its bondage to corruption. And obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. And not only the creation. But we ourselves.

Who have the first fruits of the spirit. As we wait eagerly for adoption of our sons. The redemption of our bodies. So just wait.

Let's pray.