

Romans 8:18-27

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Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] I've got quite a lot to get through and I do want to get through it this lunchtime. And so I hope we'll have some time for application at the end, but we might not.

! What does it feel like to live as a Christian?

Last time we saw this wonderful truth, that this new life in the Spirit, that we enjoy that. The Spirit has set us free so that you and I, if we are in Christ, can live a life pleasing to God.

We've been given a new mindset to live for God in the here and now. We've got the Holy Spirit dwelling in us and he assures us that we are God's children. But the first half of chapter 8 suddenly ended with an ominous note.

Let me read to you the last verse that we looked at last time. Romans chapter 8 and verse 17. It's not on your sheets. It said this. And if children then, heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him, in order that we also may be glorified with him.

[1 : 25] Well, heirs, that speaks well, doesn't it, of the future. But suffering speaks of the hard times in the present. It's not exactly Joel Osteen's message, is it, of our best life now.

That's not the case. And in verse 17 we begin to feel a little bit of a disconnect from the teaching of a lot of what you hear on the God channel, and the gospel of the apostle Paul, that feeling of disconnect between everything will be rosy now and what is your real experience.

Look at verse 18. It says, For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed in us. So let me give you the basic framework of the New Testament understanding of what it is to live the Christian life.

And it's vital that you have a biblical framework and you have biblical expectations of the Christian life. If we are to be faithful to God and faithful to the gospel.

So verse 18 lays out the basic pattern of our Christian life. So in verse 18, For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed in us.

[2 : 43] Suffering now and glory now. Suffering in the present world and glory in the world to come. And Christian experience follows the same pattern as the Lord Jesus himself.

Jesus' life and ministry involved a lot of suffering and a lot of hardship. And he endured it for the joy that was set before him. For the sake of the glory that lay ahead of him in the ages to come. And so in verse 17, do you remember that?

We are fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him now. In order that we may be glorified with him then. So does this mean that Christian experience is one of unrelieved misery and gloom and difficulty?

Well no, thankfully not. But there is a real cost. And true discipleship is costly. There is the ongoing battle with sin in our lives.

There is the war that was mentioned in chapter 7 in verse 23. Which led Paul to cry out, O wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death? There is also the opposition of the world.

[3 : 49] Which is hostile to God. There is the battle with the forces of evil. There is the struggle with illness. And weakness. And disappointments. Which are just part of the walk and move of living in this world.

Seeing. Sharing. Enjoying fully the glory of God. That lies in the world to come. But for now discipleship is a path of hardship.

And it seems to me that is the basic New Testament pattern. The contrast is not just between the now and the then. But it is also between the lesser and the greater. Look at verse 18 again. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time.

Lesser. Are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed in us. Greater. So however hard it may be to follow Christ in this world. These present sufferings are not comparable with the glory that lies ahead.

They are incomparable in duration. Our present suffering is for a short few years. Future glory is for all eternity. They are incomparable in degree.

[4 : 54] And so whatever difficulties following Christ may bring you. They are compared with future glory and magnitude. Well a bit like a speck of dust.

Compared to a planet. Or if you've got those old fashioned weighing scales. It's like putting a feather in one of the pans. And putting an elephant on the other pan. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4 verse 17.

This light and momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory. That is the elephant beyond all comparison. It will be costly.

To be a disciple of Christ. But it will be worth it. And it will be worth it because the eternal weight of glory lies ahead in the future. It's very difficult for your friends at work or your neighbours.

The secular mindset which says. This life is all you've got. And I think it's very very different from the kind of Joel Osteen God Channel line. You get your best life now.

[5 : 59] The centre of gravity in lots of those messages. Particularly Joel Osteen. Is about success and prosperity and happiness and glory now. And the price tag of discipleship seems to be removed.

What difference does it make? What framework you operate with? Maybe you just say. Why are you being so divisive? Well I think. If you think this afternoon. That it's God's plan to give you a happy.

Prosperous. Successful life. Now. I think that's got lots of implications. When things go wrong in your life. You are going to feel resentful that God has let you down.

When you get sick. When you lose your job. When a loved one dies. When you're not as successful at work as you want to be. When you take a stand for the gospel. And when you share the gospel.

And it starts to involve a cost. Well. What will you do? You'll keep your head down. Won't you?

When people make fun. Of you. To be a Christian. Or when your prospects.

[7 : 00] At work. Will be affected by your witness. How do you keep going. As a Christian. Well this chapter gives you the framework. I think.

Because it is suffering. Then glory. When serving Christ costs us. I'm going to take my foot off the gas. Won't I? Unless I've got this suffering.

Then glory framework. When serving demands time. And commitment. And really getting stuck in.

In the local church. I'll leave it to others. I'm going to say I'm just too busy. Or when serving.

Makes demands on my finances. I'm going to leave it to others. To give sacrificially. And

generously. I'll be just a consumer. Who pitches up. When being godly.

Requires that I really battle. With sin in my life. And I make time. For his word and prayer.

Committing to meet with other believers. It will just all feel like too much hard work.

[7 : 56] And on it goes. But if my basic framework. Framework. Is suffering. And then glory in the age to come. I'll accept that. As part of the cost.

Of true discipleship. And I'll get on with it. Knowing. Glory lies ahead. I think it's very hard. To see how anyone can be a true disciple of Jesus. Without having this basic framework.

In place. In fact this pattern is so fundamental. The apostle Paul says. It's written into creation around us. It's written into the non-human natural world.

And that brings me to point too. Look at verse 19. It says. For the creation wakes with eager longing. For the revelation of the sons of God.

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 from its bondage to corruption. And obtain the freedom and the glory.

[8 : 54] Of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together. In the pains of childbirth until now. So in the past. Creation. Has been subjected to futility. Verse 20 says that.

Doesn't it? Verse 21. It says bondage to corruption. When the first human beings rebelled against their good God. Judgment fell.

And judgment fell not only on them. But on the natural world. So God said. Cursed is the ground. Because of you. And that judgment had cosmic consequences.

Death and decay. Entered into the world. Meaninglessness. And futility. Became written. Into the created order. And if you like.

At the moment of judgment. The computer program was rewritten. And all of a sudden. Futility entered into every line. And that's what the book of Ecclesiastes tells us.

[9 : 56] Something is rotten in the state of the world. The whole created order. Is out of joint. But in the age to come.

Creation will be liberated. To share in the glory. Which we ourselves enjoy. So look at verse 21. Creation itself.

Will be set free. From its bondage to corruption. And obtain the freedom. And the glory of the children of God. So again. Look at that. What lies ahead. For the created order.

It's not destruction. But transformation. And the Old Testament prophets. They said there would be a renewed heaven. And a renewed earth. And the desert would blossom.

The wolf would lie down. The lamb. But that is all future. For now in the present. The creation is groaning in pain. Verse 22. It's been groaning together. In the pains of childbirth until now.

[10 : 51] From weeds in the gardens. Natural disasters. Everything is out of joint. Creation. Doesn't fulfil its potential. But even in the groaning.

There's a promise of what lies ahead. Groaning together in the pains of childbirth. Now when you hit your thumb. With a hammer. It's jolly painful isn't it.

And it makes your eyes water. But there is no good. That comes from that pain. Contrast that. To the labour pains. Of a pregnant woman. They are a little bit more painful.

That it is pain. With a purpose. Isn't it? It's saying that. A new life. Is about to enter the world.

So the creaking. And the groaning. Of the created order. He says here. They are like labour pains. A new world is on its way. A new world is about to emerge. Jesus told his disciples. In Mark 13.

[11 : 48] There will be earthquakes. And famines. But actually. They're birth pains. So when we read. Of a natural disaster. It is right. To mourn. With those who are affected.

Directly. But there is also. A sense. In which we are to recognize. That they are labour pains. And there is a sense.

In which I can put it. In which there should be. Some form of excitement. Apparently. The natural world. Gets excited. Itself as well. Look at verse 19. For the creation.

She waits with eager expectation. Longing. For the revealing of the sons of God. The non-human natural world. Waits with eager longing. That literally means.

It stretches its head. So when there is a film premiere. In Leicester Square. And fans queue up for hours and hours. To get a glimpse of the stars. And the car. Finally pulls out.

[12 : 41] And out gets Tom Cruise. Everybody stands on tiptoes. To get a view of him. Partly because he is so short. But the creation. Stands on tiptoes.

Waiting to get a glimpse. Creation is eagerly. Straining its neck. Not to look at Tom Cruise. But to reveal the sons of God. And when God returns. The sons of God.

That is you. That is believers. Will be revealed. In all their glory. Our bodies will have been raised. And transformed. Our glory is now hidden. Which will then be revealed. And when it is.

The creation itself. Will be liberated. To share the glory. Isn't that something. The pattern of suffering now. Glory then. And it is so fundamental. That it is even shared.

By the natural world around us. The subhuman creation. Now obviously. Creation is being personified here. I am not sure. How trees.

[13 : 38] And flowers. And rocks. And dogs. Eagerly await the age to come. I don't know exactly. How that works. But is it possible. That trees. And frogs.

And dogs. Have a better understanding. Of life. Than many of the people around us. That your cat. Somehow grasps. This suffering. Glory pattern. Rather than some people.

Who even profess. The Christian faith. Isn't it ironic. That your potted plants. At home. Were more clued up. Than you were. About the basic pattern. Of life. In God's world. Suffering now.

Glory then. And I need that. If I'm going to keep going. In faith. In this world. It's fundamental. To true Christian experience. And life. In the spirit. And that's what we see. In verses 23 to 27.

The groaning. In the glory. Of the Christian. Look at verse 23. For we know. That the whole creation. Has been groaning together. In the pains of childbirth. Until now. And not only the

creation.

[14:33] That's creation. But we ourselves. We are the first fruits of the spirit. Groan inwardly. As we wait eagerly. For adoption. Adoption. As sons. The retention of our bodies.

Now we saw earlier on. In Romans chapter 8. That every believer. Has God's Holy Spirit. Dwelling in him. It's a staggering privilege. To be the temple of God. To be the dwelling place. Of the Holy Spirit.

But notice how the spirit of God. Is described in verse 23. It's an agricultural image. First fruits of the spirit. The first fruits. They are the first part.

Of the harvest. And what are the implications. Of describing. The Holy Spirit. As the first fruit. Well firstly. It means that we enjoy it. We enjoy him.

Partially. The first fruits. Are a foretaste. Of what is to come. So the first fruits. Of the harvest. They are a tiny fraction. Aren't they. Of the harvest. Which is to come.

[15:27] You get a basket of apples. And it's a promise. That a whole orchard. Will soon arrive. And the first fruit. Of the spirit. Gives us this tiny foretaste. Of what lies ahead.

And the future glory. Will be infinitely better. Than this. It's a trailer. For the main film. When my wife. Bakes.

On a Saturday. And the children. Are allowed to come in. And occasionally. Put their finger in. And taste the mixture. They are getting. Are they. A foretaste. They are getting.

The first fruits. Of what will emerge. From the oven. In an hour or so. It's a foretaste. And so. Our experience. Is now. That. It is partial. It is limited.

We must not live. As if this life. Is everything. And everything. God has for us. Because it's not. Some of this life. Will be tasty. It will be foretasty.

[16:24] But if we're not looking forward. To the cake. Then that's a big problem. We've missed the point. The first fruits. The first fruits. Are a foretaste. But they're actually. Also a deposit. Which guarantees. The rest will to come. So Ephesians chapter 1 verse 14.

Speaks of the Holy Spirit. As a guarantee. Of our inheritance. Until we. Acquire possession of it. You've got to buy a car. You put down. 200 pounds. As a deposit. And that tells.

The owner of the garage. That you will be back. In a few days. With the rest of the cash. The Holy Spirit. Is himself. The deposit. That God has put down. And by giving us. The Holy Spirit.

He is saying. Here is my guarantee. That you will inherit. Everything I've promised. In the ages come. And if I think. Now. Now is the life.

I've missed the point. The reality is. That in the here and now. Life and the spirit. Will include. Plenty of groaning. Look at verse 23. We groan.

[17:23] Inwardly. And if I am groaning. As a Christian. That is not a sign. That you're immature. And if you are groaning. As a Christian. It's not a sign.

That you've missed out. On something. If you are groaning. As a Christian. That is a mark. Of authentic. Christian experience. We groan. Inwardly. And we groan.

Because like everyone else. We live. And we suffer. The effects. Of living in a fallen world. And the illness. And the weakness. Of the body. And the futility. Of so much. Of what we do. In this life.

The grind. Of the daily routine. The loss. Of loved ones. The disappointment. Of people letting us down. The pain. Of seeing the suffering. Of others. We groan. However. Because unlike everyone else.

We are pained by sin. Sin in our own lives. The daily battle. Against sinful desires. The longing. That we have. To be more like Christ. The disappointment.

[18:16] When our performance. As Christians. As we have. Lags behind what we desire. We cry. Oh wretched man. Oh wretched woman. That I am. There is a longing inside us. For future glory. And we groan too.

Because as we seek to follow Christ. We come up against opposition. From a world in rebellion. Against him. Do you remember. I think sometimes. In the 80s and 90s. There was a great craze. Wasn't there?

There were yellow stickers. With a big smile on it. That said. Smile. Jesus loves you. And people used to put them on Bibles. And put them on stickers. And different things. I want to start a new yellow sticker.

Which says. Groan. Jesus loves you. That is the message of Romans 8. Authentic Christian experience involves groaning. I'm grinning.

But groaning is there. This isn't to say the attitude is always me. Why do we know that? Because verse 23. We groan inwardly. As we eagerly await for adoption of sons.

[19:13] And redemption of our bodies. Just as creation stands on tiptoe. Looking forward to that time. So do God's children. When they are glorified. And so one of the marks of believers.

Is that they're standing on tiptoe. Eagerly waiting for the glory to come. Our adoption of sons. Of course we are adopted into God's family. But there's another sense in which we are looking forward to it.

The full benefits of adoption. They lie in the future. And so again you have this framework of the Christian life. The tension of the already. The kingdom of God has come.

But the kingdom of God will come. And so we wait. We hope. We wait for the redemption of our bodies. When we will not get tired.

When there will not be old age. When there will not be sickness or fatigue. And we long for that. And the more we appreciate it.

[20:11] The more we will eagerly hope for it. We long for that future day. When our bodies will be raised and restored. To sinless perfection. Eager waiting. Is one of the marks of authentic Christian experience.

We do not have it all now. Another word for that is hope. Isn't it? Verse 24. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope.

For who hopes for what he sees. But if we hope for what we do not see. We wait for it with patience. It's really counterculture. Isn't it? Orientating your whole life.

To what you cannot see. Living for what you cannot see. Your work colleagues. Your friends. Your neighbours. They live for what they can see. And what they can own. But the spirit within us is our deposit.

He assures us. It isn't just wishful thinking. But although it is certain. This hope does by definition require. Verse 25. Can you see that patience?

[21:09] We wait patiently. That's hard. You ask the couple who are engaged. You ask the parents who are expecting. You ask the couple that are trying for a child. You ask the single person. Who really wishes they were married.

Patience is tough. But it's a necessary part of Christian experience. And I want to say to you. Is a lack of patience. That people get tired of waiting.

And they get tired of the biblical. And they give up on the biblical gospel. Sometimes they give up altogether. Or they go on this kind of spiritual self-help. I want glory now.

Help. But notice as we close. We don't just have the first fruits of the spirit. We have the help of the spirit. The spirit who assures us of future glory.

Also helps us in our present suffering. Look at verse 27. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the spirit.

[22:03] Because the spirit intercedes for the saints. According to the will of God. And we know that those who love God. All things work together for good. For those who are called and called into his purpose. Verse 26.

Sorry. For the spirit. Likewise the spirit helps us in our weakness. He helps us in a way that we might not expect. If I asked you to shut your bible now.

And I asked you. In what way does the spirit help us? I very much doubt you would come up with verse 26. For we do not know what to pray as we ought. But the spirit himself intercedes for us.

It's grown in too deep for words. The spirit helps us with an intercession. He intercedes for us. In our hearts.

He prays for us. He says it twice. When we pray. We often don't know what is the right thing to pray for. We don't know what to pray. And so often we're conscious. Aren't we? Of the inadequacy of our prayers.

[23:00] But as we pray. This verse assures us. Doesn't it? That the Holy Spirit is praying with us. In our hearts. That it's not something you can hear audibly. With cronings too deep for words.

But it is real. Sometimes I sit at my computer. And there's a little box. And that pops up on the screen. Which says Norton antivirus.

Is performing background tasks. Do you know that? Now I can't see. The antivirus software. But it assures me.

Doesn't it? That little box assures me. That it's hard at work in the background. Protecting my computer from all the nasties. That are trying to get at it from the web. And so these verses here. Verses 26 and 27.

They're a little bit like that pop up that box. The unsealed spirit is hard at work. In the background. In our hearts. And one thing he is doing.

[23 : 58] Is to help us when we pray. Interceding on our behalf with the Father. It's an encouragement to persevere in prayer. The Son in heaven.

And the spirit in our hearts. Interceding in prayer. And this pattern. Suffering now. Glory then helps us. Doesn't it? Because prayer is essential.

But prayer is a struggle. Isn't it? But as we pray. The Holy Spirit comes alongside us in our prayer. And he helps us. He helps us to keep at it in our prayers.

And not give up. Suffering. And now glory later. What happens if you don't get this? If you don't understand.

Suffering now. And glory later. Well. You will mess up your Christian life. Because there will be discouragement.

[24 : 53] And there will be suffering. The only thing you have to do. Is live long enough. And if they haven't come to you. They will sooner or later. And when they come. If you don't have the suffering. Now glory later.

Framework. It will devastate you. But the bigger danger. Is that you mess up your eternity. Because we live for eternity. Life is very short.

And eternity is very long. And going your own way. Is easier now. But very costly in eternity. Going Christ's way now.

Is costly. But it's very worth it in eternity. Because a weight of eternal glory lies ahead. Let's pray.