

# Romans 8:18-30

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[ 0 : 00 ] Do open your Bibles to Romans chapter 8. Romans chapter 8. And we're in this great chapter. I'm going to look at verses 18 to 30 this morning.!

He says, if we're children, children of God, if we're children of God, then we are heirs, heirs of God. Fellow heirs with Christ.

Provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. It's a marvelous statement, isn't it? Glorified with him. It's a great thought, conjures all sorts of images in our mind that we'll be glorified with the Lord Jesus Christ.

But the previous little phrase is a little bit more difficult, isn't it? A little bit more upsetting, more disturbing. Provided we suffer with him.

Provided we suffer with him. There's much in your life and in my life that's far from glorious. In our world today there is suffering.

[ 1 : 26 ] Suffering all over the world. In dozens of countries, millions of people, many, many Christians face troubles. They are disturbed, killed.

Many people are mixed up, confused by suffering. And maybe you can look at your own life and your own family situation and see that there's real suffering which causes you great pain and great discouragement.

And if God is our loving Heavenly Father, why do such things happen? What is God doing?

And that's what Paul goes on to deal with this morning. He calls in verse 18, the sufferings of this present world. I think that's really helpful because when you become a Christian, when you submit under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, he doesn't promise you an immediate escape from suffering. Many people then, many people now have got this strange view of Christianity. And so if you watch the God channel, you can see, can't you, in other ways, that if you become a Christian, well, immediately you kind of are caught up to heaven now on earth.

[ 2 : 44 ] And you escape all suffering if you're really following Jesus. You'll never suffer again if you're really all out for Jesus. But Paul is far too honest and he's far too biblical for that.

Look at how he begins in verse 18. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time right now are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

This verb, I consider, it was used of an accountant, kind of drawing up their end-of-year accounts. There's two columns. There's the column of income and there's the column of expenditure.

And Paul draws up these two columns. And on one column, he says, there's suffering. And on the other column, there is glory. And he says, there is a gross disproportion between those two columns.

One column, the column of glory, is much bigger. It is much more joyful than the other column of suffering. The sum total.

[ 3 : 53 ] You put everything in that column of suffering. This present world. Everything in that column. You add it all to its great total.

And it's still worth nothing compared to what's in the other column of glory. You can't compare the two. One, the column of glory, is incredibly greater.

It is more glorious than the other. So do you see what he's saying? He's acknowledged the reality of suffering. We may suffer. We do suffer. We will suffer. But Paul is absolutely certain that what is coming, the glory of the future, will make our suffering now seem like nothing.

And it will answer every question. And so let me say to you, I don't know your circumstances all that well, but whatever you're suffering now, the day is coming when that suffering will be removed and will be explained.

But he says more than that. And that's what we want to think about. It's not just saying, grit your teeth, grin and bear it, heaven is coming.

[ 5 : 06 ] It's what some Christians believe, isn't it? We'll get there someday. And he's just saying, grit your teeth, stick it out, and in the end there'll be a happy ending, no matter how bleak it gets. No, he's saying much more than that.

And what Paul does in this little section is he provides us with three great encouragements. He helps us to understand and cope with the present suffering in this present life.

That in the days to come we will enter into glory. That's true and that's wonderful. But he's also saying there's actually glory now. Glory is broken in now.

There's thankfulness now. There's victory now. And so three arguments. If this is 19 to 25, I want you to see God's groaning creation. God's groaning creation.

And so we human beings are not the only sufferers in this world. There are lots of other sufferers in the world. He says in verse 22, can you see it? The whole of creation has been groaning together.

[ 6 : 10 ] If you look at verse 20, it tells you that creation has been subjected to futility. And so this whole creation has been groaning together.

It's not just that we are the only creatures having pain and discouragement. It's not that we live in a perfect world, but we're the problem.

And we've sinned and we're suffering and our life is terrible. No, he's saying everything is suffering. Your dog that you've brought is suffering.

Your fish that I wish you'd brought is suffering. Your birds are suffering. The grass out there is suffering.

The mountains, the rivers, the seas, they're all suffering. They are all suffering. That's what Paul is saying.

[ 7 : 13 ] You say to yourself, hang on a minute, Paul. What kind of argument is this? How cheerful is this? Couldn't get more depressing. Are you not saying, cheer up?

You are groaning people in a groaning world. Is that the message? Is that something to be happy about? Well, look what Paul is saying.

Look at verse 20. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who was subjected in hope.

That the creation will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. Can you just see at the start of that verse, can you see there's a reason why the world is suffering?

There's a reason why the world is in the mess it's in. It's our fault, the way that things are in the world. Suffering is not natural to creation.

[ 8 : 14 ] Suffering is not inevitable. Suffering is not of the essence of creation. When God made the world, do you remember it? In Genesis 1 and 2, you've got that repeated refrain, it was good, it was good, it was good.

He made a non-suffering place. Suffering is abnormal. It's an intruder. It's entering in because of the fall of man. And so the Lord speaks to Adam.

Do you remember it in the Garden of Eden? Let me read it to you. Genesis 3, 17. And God says to Adam this, He said to Adam, Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree which I commanded you not to eat, cursed is the ground because of you.

And in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you. And you shall eat of the plants of the field. It's because of you. Do you see the explanation? It's Adam and Eve who first brought suffering into this world.

It's because of their sin and their failure. And their sin has had cataclysmic effects. The whole world is affected.

[ 9 : 27 ] And it's been affected ever since by suffering. Creation suffers because of the sins of humans. But here's the glorious thing. It's not the end of the story. Creation suffers because of humans.

But the story goes on. Creation will be restored because of humans. Look at verse 19. For creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

Maybe I shouldn't have said that creation will be restored because of humans. But creation will be restored with humans. Because of God's mercies. Again, look at verse 21.

For the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom and the glory of the children of God. We'll obtain, the world will obtain the glorious freedom of the children of God.

They suffered because of us. And they will be restored because of us. Or with us. Creation itself will share with human beings in the healing of the world.

[10:34] There will be a new heavens and there will be a new earth, the Bible says. And the creation waits in hushed expectancy. Standing on tiptoes. To see the dawning of the glorious day.

And here's the point. Verse 22. The whole of creation is groaning together. In pains. What's the next word? What kind of pains? The end of verse 22. The pains of childbirth.

The pains of childbirth are good pains. The pains of childbirth are the pains of new life. It's the pain of blessing.

It's not the pain in the world without meaning. It's not the pain of death pangs. You can't look at our corrupted, fallen world and say, look, the world is going to die.

The world is going to vanish. It's not that sort of pain. It's not the pain of a man or a woman taking their last few breaths. It's the pain of a young woman waiting to deliver a baby.

[11:38] It's a pain, but it's a joyful pain. A wonderful pain. It's not suffering with no reason for grief. The pain in the world, he says, they are groaning together in the pains of childbirth.

And we share in this creative groaning, he says in verse 23. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption of sons to the redemption of our bodies.

When creation groans, we're looking forward to something wonderful, something joyful, something happy. And that is what the pain is about. That is what the pain is preparing us for.

The sense of longing and unhappiness is a sense of privilege and life. And every word Paul uses here leads you to look for a better future. He talks in verse 23 of the first fruits.

The first fruits which guaranteed the future great harvest. In verse 23, he speaks of adoption, that we are going to be heirs with a rich father. He says in verse 25, we hope for what we do not see.

[12:48] It's a wonderful picture that is joyful. We long for that day. We pray for it. We hope for it. So we live in an age, don't we, of cataclysmic fear.

And so I think it's changed in the last kind of four to five years where we need to fear something.

The country needs to collectively fear something. And so Brexit, do you remember that?

Cataclysm. Fear, fear, fear. COVID. Fear, fear, fear. Now, climate change. Climate change is the big thing.

If we don't act now, cataclysmic fear. Now, I don't want to talk about any of those three things. I'll complain. But there is a sense in there, whereas Christians, we sit loosely on these three things.

We don't give in to the way that the world talks about it. We don't give in to the primary school teacher that basically tells the children it's like chicken licking and the sky is about to fall in.

Because we recognize that the Bible's worldview, the Bible's picture tells us that creation groans.

[14:01] We don't deny reality. We agree with it. And yet we see what is the message that creation is telling us. And we long for the future.

We pray for it. We hope for it. Look at verses 24 and 25. 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 will wait for it with patience.

Cajardus Vos, the theologian in the early 20th century, he said the New Testament is preeminently occupied with the things which are eternal. And so life here and now matters, but life here and now is a preparation for eternity.

And that attitude permeates the New Testament. It's utterly foreign to the spirit of our age. Vos says this. He says all lesser hopes will disappoint us and fail us.

The resurrection is our real and ultimate hope. And so the present hope that we live in is one of tension. And the present time that we live in is one of suffering.

[15:10] And sometimes there is hurting and disappointment. But all of that is hopeful. All of that is hopeful. And it's positive. And it causes us to wait with patience.

We are suffering the pains of childbirth. But only because we are in the process of moving towards something that is better. And then he comes in verses 26 and 27 to God's interceding spirit.

God's interceding spirit. And he deals with another problem of our weakness and how it's relevant.

We pray about all sorts of weaknesses and troubles, don't we?

But look what Paul says. Here is the problem. He says in verses 26 and 27, We do not know what to pray as we ought.

We do not know what to pray for as we ought. And sometimes we ask for things that we haven't really thought about.

[16:18] We don't really know if that is what God intends or not. And often when I'm praying, like you, when I look at situations, I do not know what the answer is. And very often we find ourselves praying and we do not know what God's will is.

And we don't know what his desire is. And we know what suits us, don't we? But that is not always the answer to the prayer. And that is not always what we should be asking for.

Paul says here, the Spirit intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. That is a wonderful thing. That in our inward, inarticulate longings and desires, the Spirit, Holy Spirit himself, prays through those things.

And so when you don't know what to say to God, God the Holy Spirit says something to God through what you don't know what to say.

And when you are not using words in your prayer, and you are just waiting before God, and you are groaning before God, and weeping before God, and just saying little words here and there, and you're not really sure what you're saying, and you're not sure what you should be asking, and you don't know the answer, the Holy Spirit is there.

[17:49] And the Holy Spirit is praying, praying through your groaning, and praying through your despairing cries. And we don't know what we need, but God the Spirit is at work, and he is praying for us.

And I think he is also saying here that the Spirit, the Holy Spirit himself groans. You've got to be careful.

But it's not just that he joins our groaning, and he makes sense of our senseless groaning, but I think Paul is saying here that he himself, the Holy Spirit groans.

He's told us that creation groans. He's told us that Christians groan. And now he's telling us that the Holy Spirit himself groans, that he is longing for the day when his work in us will be complete and perfect and glorious.

I think we've got an example of me where Jesus goes to the grave of his friend, where he weeps at the tomb of Lazarus. He's touched with all our infirmities and sorrows, and he weeps for us.

[19:07] He longs for that day when death will be no more. And I think it's possible that the Spirit still does the same. He weeps for us. He brings his encouragement and his love.

It may not always be the case, but the Spirit is saying very precisely and in details what he wants from the prayer.

How this mighty intercession is powerfully effective. Verse 27 suggests, I think, that the Spirit isn't always speaking. That he who searches the heart knows the mind of the Spirit.

He knows the Father. He knows, the Father knows what is in the mind of the Spirit. I don't want to be dogmatic on that point. The Spirit may not always say what he wants.

He may not always articulate what he wants, but God the Father always knows the mind of God the Spirit. And then Paul goes on to say to his need that the Spirit intercedes for his children according to the will of God.

[20:16] And so whether it's the word that he brings, or the heart that he shows, we do not know what to pray for as we ought. But the Holy Spirit, who indwells the believer, who is in your heart, knows what to pray for.

He knows what to pray for. And he brings those things to the Father in whatever way is right. He brings them to God the Father, and nothing is left out.

Nothing is misstated. Nothing is presented in the wrong way. The Spirit prays better than you and I could ever pray for yourself. More fully, more wonderfully, more biblically, more immediately.

And so the Spirit is praying for you every day. So as one commentator says, God knows the mind of God, and will answer the prayer of God.

And so can you see here, just that becoming a Christian means that you are caught up into the life of the Godhead. You are caught up into that Trinitarian relationship between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

[21:28] It is not a little thing. The Spirit prays. And then lastly and briefly, in verses 29 to 30, do you see God's overruling purpose?

God's overruling purpose. This is the same apostle who had the 39 lashes.

This is the same apostle who wrote this, who is cast overboard into the sea. It's a shipwreck for three days. All the bad things, all the oppositions, all the tortures he's endured, the house arrest, the beatings, all of those things.

And as you think about that, you think about what our brothers and sisters are undergoing all around the world today, and it's very easy to get discouraged. But Paul says, no, don't, don't, don't do that.

Because verse 28, he says, we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good. [ 22 : 35 ] They work together for good. All things. Something, isn't it? It's not just the good things, but the bad things.

Not just the clever things, but the stupid things. Not just the great successes, but the dumb mistakes. All things. And God overrules them for our good.

That doesn't mean that it doesn't matter. It doesn't mean that we should kind of give up trying to avoid wrong things. But the point is this, that God is in control. And that he is the sovereign king, and he governs everything for the true good of his people.

And so if your life is like mine, which it is, there are a thousand things in your life that you can look back on, and you can remember them, and you can look at them, and you can say, I cannot see in any way how that can be any good to me.

And Paul says, God overrules. Because of his purpose. Verse 28. And one of the great words in this passage, which I think is often overlooked in this verse, is that little phrase, his purpose.

[ 23 : 53 ] His purpose. And so one of the greatest words in Romans 8 is those two words, his purpose. His purpose to save us, to keep us, to bless us, to provide for us, to bring us to glory.

His purpose formed in eternity before the creation of the world. His purpose, which he will inevitably and infallibly accomplish. That those who are called according to his purpose, that is the great truth. The purpose of God drawn up in detail before the universe was made. And Paul now analyzes that, doesn't he, in the next verse. And if we had time, we could deal with it in more detail.

I preached on this verse for four weeks, verse 29, a couple of years ago. Do you see what it says? He said, God foreknew, that means before any creation, before any time, God loved his people. He loved his people with intensity. He knew them, he chose them, he selected them. And before anything of the world was made, and then he predestined them. First he loved them, then he predestined them.

[ 25 : 06 ] He set purposes on them, and Paul just gives you two. To be conformed to the image of his son, and that all his people would be made perfect in holiness. And then he says, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers, that Jesus would be the leader of a huge, Jesus-like family.

So God foreknows his people. God predestines his people. And then God calls them, doesn't he? That's the third thing.

That is the effectual calling of God. He calls, and we had to answer, we had no choice. That in our lives, God comes to us, and converts us, and leads us to seek Christ, and to call on him as saviour. And in calling them, God justified them. Do you remember that? So we are counted as accepted, in the Lord Jesus Christ, by God the Father. And then there's one of the most startling, and most wonderful verbs in all the Bible.

Can you see it? The end of verse 30. Can you just notice the tense? Let me read it.

[ 26 : 19 ] And those whom he predestined, he also called. And those whom he called, he also justified. And those whom he justified, he also glorified. Past tense. James Denny says, this is the most daring anticipation of faith in the New Testament.

We have not been glorified yet. We haven't been glorified yet. And yet it's so certain, so absolute, that every single one of God's people will be glorified.

Paul puts it here in the past tense. Completion. It's so certain, if you are a Christian this morning, that though you haven't been yet glorified, there's a sense in which it can be said of you in God's plan, you've been glorified.

It's an unbreakable chain. And so God completes what he begins. And that is why this morning, we need not fear suffering. Those who love God, verse 28, it's a perfect description of the Christian, isn't it?

It's a great characteristic. Do you love God? And here is the ultimate and most satisfying answer to suffering and pain and God's groaning creation.

[ 27 : 42 ] God's interceding spirit. and God's overruling purpose. That we love. We love and trust our Father.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, you have... ..

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