

Romans 8: More Than Conquerors “The Eager Longing That Gives Strength”

Romans 8:19-25

Delivered via livestream during the COVID-19 crisis at Central Baptist Church on May 3, 2020

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** We are doing a series through the second half of Romans chapter eight. I can hardly think of a more important chapter for such a time as this. In this chapter the apostle Paul shows how the message of Christianity can enable you to endure, and even rise above, the worst of all hardship, difficulty, and suffering.
 - Today Paul focuses on the power of hope to strengthen us amidst suffering.
- Viktor Frankl was an Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist who was imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp. He wrote a very famous book entitled *Man’s Search For Meaning*. In it Frankl spoke of the connection between hope in the mind and the body’s ability to fight disease. He said, **(SHOW SLIDE 2)** “*the sudden loss of hope and courage can have a deadly effect [on the body]. The prisoner who had lost faith in the future was doomed. . . he let himself decline and became subject to mental and physical decay.*”¹
 - When a prisoner lost hope their body would shut down and they would quickly die. Frankl wrote, **(SHOW SLIDE 3)** “*Any attempt to restore a man’s inner strength in the camp had first to succeed in showing him some future goal.*”²
 - It was the hope of the future that gave a person strength to endure the sufferings of the concentration camp.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 4)** We are experiencing this on a small level right now. It is hope of the future that strengthens us to patiently endure the present crisis. Imagine how different we would feel if we suddenly learned that COVID-19 will last for 30 years.
 - What keeps us patiently enduring this crisis is the hope that one day we will be free again; free to hug our family and friends, and free to have a large wedding, and free to gather in this building with 500 of our brothers and sisters in Christ.
- Yet, even when COVID-19 is over, we know that this world is still filled with hardship, suffering, and death. We need is a hope that is so great that it can enable us to patiently endure anything, even the worst of all possible suffering.
 - That is exactly what this passage is about. To discover this hope Paul says we need to reflect on three experiences.
 - First, let’s reflect on *the painful groaning*. Second, *the eager longing*. Third, *the glorious deliverance*.

THE PAINFUL GROANING

- First, let’s reflect on **(SHOW SLIDE 5)** *the painful groaning*.
 - Paul begins by saying that if you want to discover the hope that can enable you to endure anything then you must first have a clear understanding of what’s wrong with the world.

¹ Viktor Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, 75.

² Ibid.

- Why so much pain? Why so much groaning? Why are we in the middle of global pandemic?
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 6)** Our generation needs a clear explanation for why the world is the way it is because we have, for the most part, rejected the naïve views of our forefathers. For the past 100-150 years our forefathers believed that humanity is always evolving and getting better. The authors of the early 20th century declared that humanity would solve its problems, put an end to war, achieve global unity, and usher in a golden age of prosperity.
 - Their views were shattered by two world wars. We cannot believe this in light of things like 911, ISIS, and COVID-19. You can tell what a culture believes by its books and movies. Our stories are not about humanity living in a golden age. Our stories are about the end of the world or what life is like in a post-apocalyptic world.
 - So, if we are going to find a hope that is not naïve, then we must go back and ask the more fundamental question of what’s wrong with the world.
- Here in this passage Paul answers that question. He starts off by saying that creation groans. Look at verse 22. **(SHOW SLIDE 7) READ 22 – For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.**
 - When he speaks of creation he is referring to the animals and trees, the rivers and mountains, the planets and stars. He says they are all groaning in pain.
- Why is the created order groaning? Because it is trapped in a state of bondage and cannot fulfill its potential. Look at verse 20. **(SHOW SLIDE 8) READ 20 - For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it.**
 - Notice there was a definitive moment in time when the created order was placed in a state of slavery. The lions and eagles, oceans and rainforests did not want this to happen but they had no choice. God had originally made creation with great potential to blossom and flourish but this word “futility” means that creation is not able to reach its potential.
 - It’s even worse than this. Verse 21 says creation is in “bondage to corruption.” Despite all the beauty and wonder of creation, it is now like a piece of meat that gradually decays when left out on the counter. As modern science shows us, the universe is gradually dying.
- So, who or what subjugated the created order? Verse 20 says it is “him.” Did the devil do this? No, he does not have that kind of power. It was God himself who subjected it.
 - **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 9)** In Genesis 3 we read the shocking story of human beings rebelling against the very one who created them and filled their lives with good things. This great act of rebellion brings numerous consequences. One of these is that God places a curse on his own creation so that it cannot reach its potential. Thorns and thistles will now grow. Things will decay. Death will come to all.
 - From the beginning creation’s destiny was tied to that of humanity. When we fell, we took the created order down with us.
- So why are there tsunamis? Why do crops fail? Why is there COVID-19? The Bible’s explanation is that the entire created order is in a state of bondage to corruption. To

use the language of Ecclesiastes, God made his world straight, like an axle on a car that makes it drive smoothly. But one consequence of human sin is that God bent his world so that, like a car with a bent axle, things do not work the way they are supposed to.

- All of creation and humanity is like Humpty Dumpty in the old children's rhyme. Originally, Humpty Dumpty sat on the beautiful wall of the world that God created for him. But Humpty Dumpty took a great fall.
- But it is not just creation that groans. Paul also says the children of God groan. Look at verse 23. **(SHOW SLIDE 10) READ 23 - *And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly.***
 - After Janet Leitch passed away a few weeks ago I called Alex. We talked about the wonderful 58 years of marriage they had enjoyed together. But then we talked about the sorrow he was feeling. I said, ***"We groan in our bodies, don't we Alex?"*** And with a deep groan in his voice he said, ***"We do indeed and now more than ever."***
 - We groan when loved ones die. We groan when our bodies don't work like they did when we were young. We groan when we sin against the God we love.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 11)** Here then is the Bible's explanation for what's wrong with the world. Things were not always as they are now. Adam and Eve did not experience the painful groaning, but their rebellion changed everything.
 - Life in God's world is still has many wonderful things to enjoy but now there's always a fly in the ointment. There's always a pebble in your shoe. Nothing works the way it is supposed to.
- You may say, ***"well this is all very depressing."*** Indeed, it is! But it is also very realistic. The biblical authors don't go around saying—as many eastern religions do—that your suffering is just an illusion. They also don't promote the false hope that if we just work hard we will achieve heaven on earth.
 - No, Christianity begins on a very pessimistic note saying, ***"There is no ultimate hope in humanity for our hearts are bent. There is also no way we can shape our world into a perfect paradise for God himself has bent the world."***
 - This is the painful groaning.

THE EAGER LONGING

- Christianity may start pessimistically but the hope that we will now begin to see is so glorious that it far surpasses any other system of thought. Let's turn now to talk about **(SHOW SLIDE 12) the eager longing.**
 - Look at verse 19. Here we read that **(SHOW SLIDE 13) *"the creation waits with eager longing."*** This word means to crane one's neck to try and see what is coming down the road. Creation is standing on its tiptoes. It is eagerly longing for a specific event to happen and it can hardly contain its excitement.
- It is the same for all Christians. Look at the second half of verse 23. It says **(SHOW SLIDE 14) *"and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly."***

- This is the same thing. Christians cannot wait for a big future event. We are like children on Christmas Eve who can hardly sleep because we are so excited about what is to come in the morning.
- You see there are two ways to groan. One way is to groan because you have no hope. The other way is to groan but do it with hope. We see what it means to groan with hope in verse 22. **(SHOW SLIDE 15) READ 22 - For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.**
 - The groaning of a woman in labour is very different than the groanings of man who has been stabbed in the stomach and is bleeding out. Both involved true pain, but they are very different. One is painful groaning that leads to death and the other is painful groaning that leads to life. One is painful groaning that is hopeless and the other is painful groaning that is filled with hope for what enables a woman in labour to patiently endure it all is the hope that very soon the baby will be born, the pain will end, and she will weep tears of joy as she sees her precious child for the first time.
 - So you see, Christianity is very realistic about the painful groaning of life in this world but now we see that there is hope. There is something coming in the future that is so glorious that all of creation is eagerly longing for it and every Christian cannot wait for it to happen.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 16)** Before we talk more about this hope, I want you to see how much further ahead this is than anything our culture can offer you.
 - Are people today eagerly longing for some future event that will change everything? Do they have a hope like this? No. We do not have that kind of hope as a society.
 - At best, we are optimistic that the future may be a bit better than the present. Even then, a more realistic view says that bad things like COVID-19 will always happen.
- Albert Camus wrote a famous novel after WW2 called *The Plague*. In it, the city of Oran has been overrun by rats and the rats bring the dreaded Bubonic plague. The doctors and others valiantly battle the plague and finally succeed in bringing it under control.
 - However, at the end of the book the doctor brings everyone back down to reality when he says, ***“it’s only a question of time. The rats will be back.”***
 - Camu’s novel is a statement about all of life. Many also connected it the rise of Hitler. Of course, we must battle against rats like COVID and Hitler but a realistic view of life knows that the rats will be back.
- There is no ultimate hope that we can solve all the problems of humanity. We must look outside ourselves. Listen to the words of the famous German philosopher Martin Heidegger. Before he died in 1976 he gave one final interview.
 - He was asked if there is anything people can do or philosophy can do to change the state of the world. Here is what he said, **(SHOW SLIDE 17) *“If I may answer briefly, and perhaps clumsily, but after long reflection: philosophy will be unable to effect any immediate change in the current state of the world. This is***

true not only of philosophy but of all purely human reflection and endeavour. Only a god can save us.³

- Heidegger's idea of god was very different from the Bible but this is the point we must come to. We must work for a better world but the rats will always come back. We need help from outside ourselves. We need God to save us. And friends, this is exactly what the message of Christianity is.

THE FINAL DELIVERANCE

- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 18)** So, having reflected on the painful groaning and the eager longing, let us now come to identify what this future hope actually is. In the last place, let's talk about **(SHOW SLIDE 19) the final deliverance.**
 - From the moment Humpty Dumpty fell from the wall in Genesis 3, God promised that one day he would rescue his fallen creation. God rescues us through His Son Jesus Christ. He came the first time to die and rise again that you and I might have our sins forgiven and be made right with God. The Bible declares that he will come again in the future to make all things right.
 - This is the final deliverance. This is the event of all events.
- Creation is longing for this day. Look at verse 19. **(SHOW SLIDE 20) READ 19 - *For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.***
 - In this moment, true Christians are not seen for who they really are, which is nothing less than the sons and daughters of God himself. But just as Jesus' true identity was hidden on earth but will be fully revealed when he returns, so also Jesus will publicly reveal the children of God.
- But why would creation care about the public revealing of God's children? Why is creation up on its tiptoes searching for that day? Remember that creation's destiny is tied to that of humanity. When we fell, we took creation down with us. But it also works in reverse. On the day that Jesus delivers his children, he will also deliver the created order from its state of bondage.
 - Look at verse 21. **(SHOW SLIDE 21) READ 21 - *in hope²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.***
 - It is as if God said to his creation in Genesis 3: ***"I am putting you in a state of bondage because of human sin, but you will not always be in bondage. When I deliver my children, I will also deliver you."***
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 22)** Contrary to many what many Christians think, God is not going to destroy his creation. Why would creation eagerly long for its own destruction? No, we read here that creation cannot wait for the future because it is going to obtain something. What? Freedom from its present bondage so that it gets to share in the future glory.
 - God is not going to destroy his creation but purge it with fire, like a forest fire purges everything, but then brings new growth. God is going to renovate it like

³ Martin Heidegger, *Only a God Can Save Us: The Spiegel Interview 1966*, 57.

we those TV shows where they take a broken-down old house and turn into something spectacular.

- There will be no COVID virus there, no cancer cells, and no tsunamis. So even though creation groans, it cannot wait for God to finally deliver his children so that creation can also be set free.
- But it is not just creation that eagerly awaits a final deliverance. It is also the children of God. Look at verse 23. **(SHOW SLIDE 23) READ 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.***
 - We groan because even though we are already adopted by God our adoption is not yet complete. As Paul says in verse 17, we are heirs and joint heirs with Christ but groan because we have not yet received our inheritance.
 - **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 24)** To have a joint bank account means you have a right to all that is in that account. Every child of God is a joint heir with Jesus which means we have the right to share in all that Jesus will inherit. And what will Jesus inherit? Everything. Hebrews 1:2 says Jesus is “the heir of all things.”
- Jesus was given a resurrection body that is immortal. Therefore, we will also be given a resurrection body that is immortal. Never again will we groan in our bodies. Never again will we know pain.
 - Jesus will inherit the new earth and will reign forever and ever. So also, Jesus people will inherit the earth and will reign with him.
 - And best of all, Jesus was restored to his Father to dwell with him forever. And so Paul says we will inherit God himself and he will dwell with us on the new earth forever.
- So you see, our adoption means that a day is coming when we receive a final deliverance from this fallen creation in which we groan.
 - All the king’s horses and all the king’s men of this world cannot put Humpty together again. Only a god can save us now. And the great hope of Christianity is a day is coming when the king himself will ride out of heaven with all his horses and all his angels. He will come to put us back together again and place us in a world where we will never be broken again.
- When you have this hope you can patiently endure the worst sufferings of this life. The old Scottish pastor, Samuel Rutherford, says, ***“Do you feel like you have a difficult life? Does suffering overwhelm you?”*** He says, ***“Keep a record of it. Write a bill for God. Detail every tear, every groaning, and every injustice in your life. Add it all up and then give it to God on that great day. On that day God will not only make up your losses but will give you a joy that far surpasses the worst of your pain.”***
 - Right now though, Rutherford says we need to wait on his timing. He has promised you future payment. Your inheritance is coming.
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 25)** ***“When we shall come home, and enter into the possession of our Brother’s fair kingdom, and when our heads will find the weight of the eternal crown of glory, and when we will look back to pains and sufferings, then we will see life and sorrow to be less than one***

*step from a prison to glory; and that our little inch of time spent suffering in this life is not worthy of our first night's welcome-home to heaven.*⁴

- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 26)** When this hope fills your heart it gives you strength to patiently endure the worst of all suffering in this life for you can say with Paul, ***“I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”*** Since we have this hope, ***“we wait for it with patience.”***

⁴ Samuel Rutherford and Andrew A. Bonar, *Letters of Samuel Rutherford: With a Sketch of His Life and Biographical Notices of His Correspondents* (Edinburgh; London: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1891), 186.