

Romans (8:23-25)

Groaning With Hope

Part 34 - May 1, 2005

SUFFERING SLIDESHOW

Last week we talked about an “eternal springtime” that’s coming to God’s creation; and how creation groans as though in labor. This world is enslaved to corrosion, corruption, and cataclysm. It is broken; and no one can fix it. And no one is exempt from it either.

It has been globally subjected to God’s judicial decree of futility and frustration in response to the invasion of sin. And to see it as an *overreaction*, is to underestimate God’s holiness, and the need to counterbalance sin’s ability to con us into believing that we are gods.

Last week Paul said:

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. - *Romans 8:18-22 NIV*

So, the whole creation groans because things aren’t the way they’re supposed to be.

Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. - *Romans 8:23-25 NIV*

Q: Who groans (according to verse 23)?

A: Believers. Christians. Us!

“We ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit”

- *We ourselves*, who have received Jesus as our Savior. [Groan]
- *We ourselves*, who are filled with God’s Holy Spirit. [Groan]
- *We ourselves*, who’ve been adopted as God’s children. [Groan]

We “groan” and we “wait” because the redemption of our bodies is not a present reality.

Q: But, can we be good Christians and still groan?

A: Yes! Groaning is an acknowledgement of reality!

- Paul says we groan, he doesn't say we gripe!

When the Spirit fills us, he begins sensitizing us to the sin in us and around us, until we ache to be whole, holy, and healthy. We *are* empowered to overcome sin, but it's a daily battle. God *does* heal, but not usually according to our timetable. And we *are* filled with a *measure* of the glory of the Lord. Paul calls it: “The *firstfruits* of the Spirit”. We get a little taste of wholeness, and holiness, and healing.

Q: But, what about 1 Peter 2:24?

[Christ] himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. - 1 Peter 2:24 NIV

- [First of all] Dying to sin is a lifelong process.

And that line, “You have been healed” is often taken out of context. Peter's referring to spiritual, not physical healing. That's why it's in the past-tense. If we weren't *already* healed *spiritually* (receiving a new nature through Christ), we couldn't die to the old sinful nature.

Q: But isn't Jesus supposed to physically *heal* us and *deliver* us?

John the Baptist thought so. And Jesus fell so far short of his expectations, he sent his disciples to ask if they should keep looking for the real Messiah. Listen to what Jesus told them:

Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me. - Matthew 11:4-6 NIV

Q: Now, why would people fall away *on account of* someone who is healing the sick, raising the dead, and preaching God's Word? And why would John question Jesus?

A: Because Jesus didn't match the Jewish expectation of how the Messiah was supposed to act, and what he would do.

They thought the Messiah would come in, kick out the Romans, restore Israel politically, and *deliver* and *heal* God's people.

When John sent his messengers, he was sitting in prison. Not only wouldn't he be delivered, he would be beheaded. And though Jesus healed the sick and raised the dead, he left the majority either in their tombs or suffering their fate.

Christ didn't come to implement every aspect of his Kingdom in this fallen age. He came to accomplish (at least) four things:

1. To deliver us from sin - He purchased our *full* redemption, which will take place when we are reunited with God.
2. To demonstrate authority over death - He raised *three* of the dead to illustrate his power to grant life after death.
3. To display His Kingdom - He healed the sick (and wiped away tears) to show how things will be in his kingdom.
4. To defeat our enemy

Q: Okay. Isn't the devil responsible for all of our pain and suffering? And if he's been defeated, what's up?!

Q: Who tormented Job with all of his afflictions and troubles?

A: Satan.

Q: Who did Satan have to get permission from, to trouble Job?

A: God.

Q: So isn't God ultimately responsible for Job's troubles?

[At one point, Job says to his wife] Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble? In all this, Job did not sin in what he said. - *Job 2:10 NIV*

You see, it's no sin to recognize the sovereign hand of God behind our troubles, even when Satan, sin, or circumstance are the more immediate cause. God controls who gets sick and who gets well. And all of his decisions are for the good of his children; even when the pain is great and the sickness is long.

- The devil is an enemy on a chain.

When I worked for the wrecking yard, I'd go to various tow yards and wrecking yards. And I quickly learned to ask two questions: 1) If they had a junkyard dog. 2) Where they kept it tied up. Otherwise, I'd be minding my own business, walking between rows of cars, on a quiet, cloudless day ... birds chirping. Suddenly, you'd hear *trouble* coming your way. And you'd turn and all you would see is fangs. When he hit the end of his chain, you'd be relieved ... but not much. Your heart would still be racing, cold sweat, dizzy.

This “enemy on a chain,” unwittingly causes us to run to, and rely on the one who truly is our only hope.

GROANING WITH HOPE

So, Jesus *delivered* us from sin, *demonstrated* his authority over death, *displayed* His Kingdom, and *defeated* our enemy. And we get to enjoy those benefits ... in measure for now. God *does* heal us in answer to prayers ... but not always. And he *does* deliver us from suffering ... but not always.

Paul experienced his own prayers for healing not being answered. And so he’s had to come to some conclusions about this Kingdom that has been purchased but as of yet, not fulfilled. And his conclusions are pretty common sense:

We wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. - *Romans 8:23 NIV*

Anyone who says if you have enough faith you won’t have to wait:

- Has minimized the depth of sin and the holiness of God.
- Heaps unjustifiable guilt on the backs of God’s people.
- Has misunderstood the value of faith through suffering.

And is desperately trying to force into this fallen age, what God has reserved for the age to come. Paul couldn’t be clearer: it’s not a present reality, it’s a future hope.

For in this **hope** we were saved. But **hope** that is seen is no **hope** at all. Who **hopes** for what he already has? But if we **hope** for what we do not yet have, we **wait** for it patiently. - *Romans 8:24-25 NIV*

A good synonym for “hope” is “anticipation”; it brings to mind waiting with both eagerness *and* patience.

It’s all right to want to not hurt. It’s okay to want to be out of a wheelchair and off crutches; or to admit you have a headache and need to take some Tylenol. It’s appropriate to want to see and hear like when you were young; and to be pretty or handsome and energetic and strong.

Q: But how do we know when to pray for healing or deliverance, and when to pray for courage, peace, and perseverance?

A: Next week; next week; we’re out of time!