

Romans (8:18-22)

Prone to Groan

Part 33 – April 24, 2005

RECAPPING ROMANS

Last time, we saw that if we are children of God we are heirs with Christ. And we can expect to inherit three things:

1. God's Property (the new heaven and new earth)
2. God's Person (inexhaustible love & security)
3. God's Perfection (the ultimate extreme makeover)

Remember, we talked about driving down the coastline to inherit an estate and having the old Buick Roadmaster break down. And the common sense of keeping our eyes on the prize. But we ended on a condition to the inheritance in verse 17:

... we [must] share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.
– Romans 8:17 NIV

Paul performed many miracles, but then he prayed *three times* for his own “thorn in the flesh” and it never went away. So Paul has personally dealt with suffering that seemed “prayer-proof.” And today, he helps us understand the context of suffering, so we can stand firm, and not throw away our hope in Christ when the miseries of this broken ol’ world threaten to overwhelm us.

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

CONSIDER THIS

First, Paul gives us a key to strengthening our faith and deepening our hope in the midst of trials: perspective.

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. – Romans 8:18 NIV

Look at the word "consider"; in Greek it means "calculate". Any problem, no matter how severe, when viewed in the light of eternity, diminishes in its power to overwhelm.

Q: Have you heard the saying, "This too shall come to pass"?

- Troubles don't come to stay, they come to pass.

In 2 Corinthians (11:24-25), Paul's testimony includes receiving 39 lashes *five times* (that's 195!); being beaten by rods *three times*; being stoned once; and being shipwrecked *three times*. Yet, listen how Paul describes his plight a little earlier:

For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. - 2 Corinthians 4:17 NIV

Light and momentary?! Some of us wouldn't use those words to describe walking across the parking lot in a heavy rain!

Whenever I have a problem, I actually have two problems:

1. The problem
2. The way I look at the problem

Q: And which is the deeper, more consequential of the two?

Most of the time, your problem is not the problem, it's the way you choose to look at the problem ... that's your problem!

Q: You ever sit in a busy emergency room, waiting your turn? It's very difficult to be a patient patient when you're in pain.

When sufferings come, it takes a deep conviction and hope not to throw in the towel. So, it's not enough to just trust that the troubles will eventually go away (some may take a lifetime). Troubles must remind us of and refocus us on what is to come.

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. - Romans 8:19 NIV

Q: We're going to be "revealed"; do you know what that means?

A: It means that for now, our glory is very much "concealed".

We don't look all that great or glorious! We get hungry and tired and wore down and sick. We're weak and imperfect and we age and we die. And on the way to the grave we make some progress in overcoming selfishness and pride and greed, by God's grace through Christ.

... we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. - 2 Corinthians 4:7 NIV

But creation itself is eagerly waiting for that day when you and I and all of God's children will be revealed for what we have received in Christ.

On "Extreme Makeover," the subject is concealed until everything is ready (the crowd is so eager), and then they reveal 'em! And jaws drop, and friends are shocked; and parents gasp, and spouses often cry. Tears streaming down their cheeks: "You were so homely ... so terribly, dreadfully difficult to look at! But now look at you! How did they do that?"

- All creation is on pins and needles waiting for your big reveal.

SUBJECTED TO FRUSTRATION

For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ... - Romans 8:20 NIV

There is frustration and pain and imperfection throughout all of God's creation. And it isn't by fluke, or chance, or accident: "Creation was subjected to frustration"

Q: Do you ever feel singled out by fate - alone in your pain - and want to throw your arms up and yell: "Why me?!"

A: [Here's your answer:] you're part of a global, historical system that's been subjected to a divine, judicial decree of futility and corruption in response to sin.

Unless we have a sense of the infinite holiness of God, and, the unspeakable outrage of sin against such a God, we will inevitably see all of the misery and suffering of our world as an overreaction.

IN HOPE

And there's another perspective we need to have concerning this judicial decree. God didn't do it in vengeance; but "in hope". There is eternal purpose behind *every* pain on our planet. Some purposes are more obvious:

- A. Lifespans force evil to regenerate rather than compound.
- B. Death & pain force us to look beyond our world for hope.

And some, we can't hope to comprehend this side of Heaven.

But the one thing that is certain above all, creation is not destined for annihilation, but for restoration.

... 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. - Romans 8:21 NIV

Just a few weeks ago, the trees out those windows were bare. We could say their beauty was “concealed”. And now look at ‘em! The futility they were subjected to was full of hope. But if someone had no grasp or concept of the seasons, they’d look at those barren trees and conclude they were hopeless.

Imagine the most beautiful natural sight you’ve ever seen (e.g. Grand Canyon, Niagara Falls, and Yosemite) and realize that what you saw was diminished by sin. What’ll they look like when the curse of sin is removed?

- Creation longs to be free, and God longs to free it!

An eternal springtime is coming, when we *and* this universe will be renewed. And our glory will be so great that only a *glorified* world will be adequate to suit our new capacities for joy.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. - Romans 8:22 NIV

If you’re in a hospital and you hear a woman down the hall groaning and screaming, it makes all the difference in how you feel if you’re on the maternity ward or in the oncology unit.

Q: Why? Isn’t pain, pain?

A: No. Some pain leads to life, and some pain leads to death

So now, Paul wants to comfort our suffering with two truths:

1. I am not alone in my suffering.

I’m part of a global, divinely-ordained, God-decreed collapse of creation, into futility and frustration, because of sin. So don’t over-personalize your pain. Don’t assume you are being punished. Search your heart when you’re suffering; be serious and vigilant and humble, but don’t add misery to misery that’s not intended. You’re not alone; the whole creation groans.

2. All of my pain is leading to life.

All of the pain and groanings of this world are merely birth pains of the kingdom, promised to the children of the King. There *will be* a delivery, and you *will be* revealed.