

# Lord of Creation and New Creation

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Date: 28 November 2021

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[ 0 : 00 ] Our New Testament reading will be given by Neil. It's from Romans chapter 8, verses 18 to 39.

Let's read together in Romans chapter 8, verse 18. 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. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for the 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.

[ 1 : 14 ] In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.

And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

For those God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called.

Those he called, he also justified. Those he justified, he also glorified. What then shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?

He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?

[ 2 : 22 ] It is God who justifies. Who is it that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died, more than that, who has been raised to life, is at the right hand of God, and is also interceding for us.

Who shall separate us from the love of God, of Christ? Shall trouble, or hardship, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

As it is written, for your sake we face death all day long. We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, neither angels, nor demons, neither the present, nor the future, nor any powers, neither height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen. Amen. Let's turn back to that passage which we have just read.

[ 3 : 40 ] And we might look particularly at verses 24 and 25, where I'll just read these again. For in this hope we were saved, but hope that is seen is no hope at all.

Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. In these verses, Paul is expounding Christian hope.

And surely hope is an appropriate theme as we look back to the privilege of having celebrated the Lord's Supper this morning. The Lord's Supper is not only an act of remembrance in our part, it is also an act of proclamation.

And each time, Paul tells us, each time we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. And so the Lord's Supper not only looks back to the death of the Lord Jesus, but it looks forward to his coming again.

And so the Lord's Supper always elicits hope in the hearts of those who participate in it. Now, interestingly, in these two verses, Paul speaks of hope as a noun, and he also speaks of it as a verb.

[ 5 : 11 ] And it's very interesting to see how that distinction works out in his exposition. The original recipients of this letter were in Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire.

And what Paul was saying here about hope was something entirely new to them. Scholars and historians looking back tell us that religious hope was practically unknown in the ancient world. One scholar wrote, living hope as a fundamental religious attitude was unknown in Greek culture. However, while these ancient cultures look back in nostalgia to golden ages in the past, Judaism and Christianity look forward with hope to a new order to come.

And this surely is a reminder that the church is the community of destiny. The church is the community of the future. Of course, we look back and we give God thanks for all that he has done in the past.

But we look back in order that we might look forward and look and anticipate the coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, this particular text, I think, is particularly relevant to us in the culture in which we live today.

[ 6 : 34 ] As Western civilization, step by step, sheds its Christian heritage, it is moving into an age of pessimism and despair.

And we find media, and especially social media, in a perpetual state of insecurity. There is constant fear of environmental pollution, fear of climate change, fear of political instability, fear of racial unrest, and perhaps above all at the moment, fear of the global COVID pandemic.

Now, this loss of hope is witnessed in many of the pop songs that are sung today. And it was graphically articulated two or three centuries ago by the English novelist H.G. Wells, who said as he looked out on the world of his day, and he could say it if he were alive today, he said this, there is no way out or round or through.

And so we might ask ourselves this evening, having had the privilege of celebrating the Lord's Supper, which attitude characterizes our lives.

Is it hope? Or is it despair? Now, Paul tells us in this chapter, in this letter, that it is possible to pass out of despair into hope.

[ 8 : 04 ] And these two verses explain how it is possible for us to pass from one into the other. In these two verses, verses 24 and 25 of Romans chapter 8, the word hope is found no less than five times.

And so Paul here is like a carpenter hitting a nail. And he's hitting it not just once, but he's hitting it five times. The first three references, hope is a noun.

And the last two, it is a verb. Now, teachers of primary children tell us that the difference between a noun and a verb is that a noun is a naming word, and hope and a verb is a doing word.

And so Paul is inviting us to name our hope, but he's also inviting us to practice our hope, to live out our hope, to experience our hope.

Not only to proclaim it and to believe it, but also to experience it in our hearts. So first of all, let us think just for a moment about hope as a noun.

[ 9 : 24 ] Christian hope looks forward. It looks for something to hope for. It looks to a future event. And that future event is, above all, the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, but specifically in this particular context, Paul is looking forward to our adoption to sonship and redemption of our bodies.

He's looking forward to that day when the Lord Jesus Christ shall return and establish his kingdom here on earth, and when the people of God will be invested with their sonship in the kingdom of God, the sonship of God the Father.

And so Paul is anticipating here what we sometimes call the glorification of believing followers of Jesus.

So Paul sees salvation as a noun primarily pointing forward to this future event, to the climax of history, to the end of the world, to the kingdom of God having completely come.

And further on in the letter in chapter 13, he says, Our salvation now is nearer than when we first believed.

[ 10 : 48 ] And so Paul is looking forward to salvation. He rounds us in the first chapter of this letter that the gospel is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.

In the old King James translation, we read that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. And that idea of the gospel being the operation of God's power working towards salvation, when salvation will be climaxed, and when it will indeed be demonstrated to the whole universe. Of course, Paul does recognize that salvation is not only a future event, it is also a present event. He speaks in chapter 1, verse 18, of the gospel being the power of God to those who are being saved.

And this reminds us that, in fact, we have here not only a noun, but we have also a verb. But the noun does look forward to the investiture of the sons of God, to the redemption of the body, that is to the resurrection, to the glorification of the people of God, and to serving God forever and ever in the new heavens and the new earth.

And so, as Christians, we are called upon to be forward-looking. He tells us, in this hope you were saved. He tells us in chapter 5, verse 2, that we boast, we are to boast in the hope of the glory of God, that is, the hope of sharing God's glory.

[ 12 : 33 ] And this reminds us that hope is not simply an event, a climax, a consummation in the future. It is also a present experience.

And so we move from thinking of salvation as a noun, to thinking of hope as a noun, to thinking of hope as a verb.

In verse 25, Paul says, We hope. And here we have a doing word, which refers not to a future event, but to a present experience.

And Paul is anticipating, he's looking forward to the climax of salvation in glory. Now, what does this hoping involve?

How can we participate in this? Well, first of all, I think it involves believing. That is absolutely crucial. It is possible sometimes to speak of hope as something less than faith.

[ 13 : 35 ] Sometimes when people are asked, Are you saved? They say, I hope so. And it's perhaps not as certain as Paul would want it to be.

Christian hope is much stronger than simply hoping so. It is to be fully persuaded. Remember what Paul said in his testimony to Timothy, that he believed that the gospel was fully persuasable and that it was something that he laid his life on, laid his soul on.

Hebrews chapter 11, verse 1 says that Faith is the substance of things hoped for. There's faith coming in again. So, hoping is not something that falls short of faith.

Rather, it builds up faith. It builds on faith. And I think that's the first element in Christian hoping. We must believe.

We must have faith. And go on exercising faith. But Paul says that it involves not only faith, it also involves believing. It also involves waiting.

[ 14 : 50 ] If we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently, he says in verse 25. So, there is this element of waiting, which Paul stresses here to some extent in this chapter.

He's reminding us that Christians continue to face difficulties and problems here on this earth until death, when they will be translated into the nearer presence of God.

But sometimes we find it difficult to wait. And we want to get there more quickly. There are sometimes Christians who feel that they can be completely delivered from sin.

I remember when I was a student, there was a medical student who was very active in the Christian union who told me that he hadn't committed a sin for three years.

And there are still Christian perfectionists throughout the world who believe that. But I think Paul would say that is a rather superficial view of sin.

[ 15 : 59 ] And I think Paul is saying here that we've got to wait. The kingdom of God does not come all at once. The kingdom of God says Jesus has come, but it has not yet fully come.

And it is, I think, dangerous and unhelpful to assume that the kingdom of God has fully come in this age in which we live at this particular point of time.

There are others who believe that Christian salvation will involve deliverance from poverty and illness. There is a health and wealth gospel, which is very popular in many parts of the developing worlds, particularly in Africa.

And preachers say that if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you won't have any illness, and you will become wealthy.

And many people who are poor, many people who are ill, are being misled by this and led into what we believe to be a false understanding of Christian salvation.

[17:10] Now, the blessings of deliverance from sin and deliverance from poverty and illness are blessings of the salvation which is still to come. And Paul is saying here we need to wait for these.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who was a well-known preacher in London in the middle of the last century, tells us that the devil exaggerates the blessing of the Christian life and that this is one of the problems that we face.

And he is urging us here to be more realistic. So Paul says hoping is believing. It is also waiting. But he says it also groaning.

He says we groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship in verse 23. And what Paul is saying here is that, again emphasizing that a degree of suffering is inevitable, he speaks about our present sufferings in verse 18.

And these sufferings continue for various reasons. First of all, our bodies have not yet been redeemed. Our bodies are subject to frailty, to pain, and ultimately to death.

[18:25] Secondly, sin is still at work within our personalities and resists the spirit whom God has sent into our hearts. And so there is a tension between our sinful heart and the Holy Spirit.

We are further called to take up our cross to follow Jesus. Jesus never said that following him would be easy. It would not be a panacea. It will involve bearing a cross and suffering for him.

And of course, we are also living in a world order that crucified Jesus. And that is one of the reasons why we need to be realistic in terms of the outworking of Christian salvation.

It will involve groaning. And for millions of Christians around the world, in countries like Burma, countries like Iraq, countries like Sudan, and others, Christians are groaning tonight.

But they're groaning in hope. And as they groan, they are hoping, hoping in the Lord Jesus Christ, who has promised to come again, and in the meantime, never to leave them or forsake them.

[19:45] And so, although they're groaning, they're not moaning that many Christians who are suffering persecution in the church tonight are rejoicing. And in a quite extraordinary way, sometimes the churches which are persecuted are more healthy and more vibrant than the churches which enjoy liberty and freedom.

So, exercising hope as a verb involves believing, it involves waiting, it involves groaning. But finally, it involves contemplating.

Paul says in chapter 5 of Romans verse 2, we boast in the hope of the glory of God. And though he doesn't use the word contemplating here, but I think that is implied.

Boasting in the hope of the glory of God does, must mean that we are contemplating that glory, and above all, that we're contemplating that God.

Paul spells out more clearly what it means to contemplate the glory of God in his second letter to the Corinthians, in 2 Corinthians chapter 3.

[21:06] I just want to read a few verses from there and to help us to just grasp what Paul is saying. 2 Corinthians 3 verse 12, Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold.

We are not like Moses who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away, that their minds were made dull. For to this day, the same veil remains when the old covenant is read.

It has not been removed because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory.

So Paul here is telling us what Christian contemplation of the Lord's glory means and how it is worked out.

[22:19] He says, first of all, we are to turn to the Lord. Now, Paul is here referring primarily to people coming, turning to the Lord for the first time.

And some translations translate this turning as being converted. And that is absolutely a right understanding of what it means here.

But we perhaps mistakenly sometimes think of conversion as being something that begins only once, that happens only once. And Paul, I think, is assuming that we turn, we must turn to the Lord. And it's very important that we do, in fact, turn to the Lord and face him. He calls us to meet him in his presence.

And the Hebrew word for presence is, in fact, the presence of God is the face of God. And God invites us to turn, to gaze upon his face, to gaze upon his revelation of himself that he's given us. [ 23 : 28 ] Now, Moses didn't see the Lord physically. But nevertheless, the Lord revealed his glory to him. And we will not see the Lord physically until we enter into his nearer presence.

But we can see his glory. We can see his majesty. We can see the beauty of his holiness. The Old Testament passage that we read in Psalm 96 speaks about the glory of God and the importance of ascribing glory to him.

Paul here speaks of the, not only of turning, he also speaks of the contemplating. We are to contemplate the Lord's glory.

We are to meditate upon the Lord's glory. It's not simply making one, a short glance at the Lord. It involves looking, keep looking, and gazing upon him and upon his revelation of himself in his son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 24 : 40 ] He invites us to meditate. The key word to meditate is found again and again in the book of Psalms. And it is through that meditation on the Lord that the Lord grants us a sense of peace in our troubled world.

Remember how the psalmist in Psalm 131 says, he says that, I quieted my soul in the presence of the Lord. And living as we do in an age of hyperactivity, it's so important for us to take time, A, to turn to the Lord and B, to contemplate him.

And what Paul is saying here is that as we contemplate him, we are transformed. We, by reflecting his image in our lives and in our characters, we are inwardly transformed.

We become more like him. We become more sanctified. And God's will is that we should be increasingly becoming more and more like him so that as we live day by day, others may see the Lord in us.

So this is the hope that we celebrate. This is the hope we celebrated this morning in the Lord's Supper. It is the hope for which we give thanks this evening.

[ 26 : 03 ] So just as we finish, let us just reflect for a moment. Reflect on the fact that the day will come when all of us, without exception, will have to face death and have to cross the last frontier.

What is your hope? What is my hope? As we face that inevitable juncture in life. Paul tells us that we can have hope.

He tells us that that hope can become a blessed reality. that he invites us to believe, he invites us to wait, he invites us to groan, he invites us to contemplate him in order that we might reflect his glory and in reflecting his glory be ourselves transformed more and more into the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

for any of us here tonight who do not yet have that hope, let me again tell you that the gospel says that we can pass out of despair, out of darkness, into hope and into light.

So we are reminded by implication of the importance of being ready for that day when the Lord will come and say to us as he said to the rich man in the parable, tonight your soul will be required of you.

[ 27 : 42 ] Those of you who have visited Kelso Abbey down in the borders may have noticed an inscription on the wall around the cemetery there which says this, remember man as you passed by as you are now so once was I as I am now so must you be prepared for death and follow me.

Now someone who read that he was challenged but he did not know which way the man who wrote it went and so he added the two lines which say this, to follow you is time ill spent until I know the way you went and so important for us to follow those who have gone before us.

That's what the 11th chapter of the writer to the Hebrew stresses. We follow the Lord Jesus Christ before a host of witnesses who have gone before us into the presence of God and they invite us to follow the Lord Jesus Christ who is the way as we heard this morning and the truth and the life and he will lead us into the presence of his father and into an eternity of glory of joy and of service.

Let's bow our heads for a moment of prayer. Our father in heaven as we come before you now we ask and pray that you will take your word and seal it in our hearts and help us to turn to you and to see you in the glory of your revelation and your son and grant that we may reflect that glory and that in reflecting it we might be transformed.

Grant oh Lord that we may be faithful witnesses and we may point others to the Lord Jesus Christ. Grant that those who all whom we know and whom we live among and whom we interact with day by day that they may come to put their trust in you and that they may have that hope of eternal life

of which Paul rejoices in this letter.

[ 30 : 13 ] So hear our prayer. lead and guide us in the closing praise and pour out your spirit upon us we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

Thank you.