

Secure in groaning

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Preacher: Nick Hallett

[0 : 00] Romans chapter 8, verse 18 to 39. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 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.

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoptions as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

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 wait for it with patience.

Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with the groanings too deep for words.

[1 : 18] And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined, he also called, and those whom he called, he also justified, and those whom he justified, he also glorified. What then shall we say these things? 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 with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Jesus Christ is the one who died. More than that, who was raised?

Who was at the right hand of God? Who indeed is interceding for us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

[2 : 37] Lord, as it is written, for your sake we are being killed all day long. We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Thank you, Michael. J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series, Our World Famous, The Magical World of Hogwarts has been translated into 80 different languages and sold over 500 million copies worldwide.

It's broken world records for the fastest-selling books in history. J.K. Rowling's desire to create a magical world of Harry Potter came from a deep longing within her.

But the journey was hard. After creating the idea of Harry Potter, her mother died of multiple sclerosis the same year. She went to Portugal to get married.

[3 : 52] After only a few years, she ended up getting divorced. She moved to Edinburgh with a daughter and no money and no job. She became depressed. Despite submitting her manuscripts to over, I think, nearly 12 major publishers, they all rejected it.

But eventually, Bloomsbury published Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone in 1997, and the rest is history. The journey was incredibly hard, but all the groanings of her sufferings were turned into a deep longing to create a magical world.

She didn't give up. She kept on writing. Her groanings were turned into longings. We've been looking at Romans 8 for the last few weeks, and we're continuing our series looking at Paul's letters to the Romans.

And we've seen already that if you're a Christian, if you belong to Christ, if you're in Christ, if your life is bound up with his, then there's nothing to fear. The beginning of our chapter, chapter 8, starts with the joy that Paul has by saying there's no condemnation in Christ.

And at the end, verse 39, he ends by saying there's no separation. Nothing can take you away from Christ. And last year we looked at, sorry, last week with Rupert, we looked at the previous part, where we see that Christians are God's children.

[5 : 17] Those whom God is at work by his Spirit are sons and daughters of God. Paul has a deep joy inside that he can't keep to himself. But what about the sufferings of life?

I mean, what about death and multiple sclerosis and divorce and poverty and depression? What about rejection and failure? How can Paul be so confident and joyful in the face of such pain? Perhaps you're here this morning and you'd love to have the joy that Paul has in this chapter. You'd love to be so overwhelmed with the joy of no condemnation that you feel like you're on cloud nine. You'd like to be so confident that nothing can separate you from Christ that you feel like you can face anything.

But the reality is, life is hard. You don't really feel like that at all. But I want us to see from this part of Romans 8 that the way to have joy, the way to keep going in the Christian life is to turn your groanings into longings.

Instead of giving up, instead of letting the sufferings of life get you down, Paul wants us to use them to turn them into a deep longing. Just as J.K. Rowling turns her groaning into a longing for the magical world of Hogwarts, Paul wants us to turn our groaning into the far better world of the new creation.

[6 : 41] And the key is verse 18. Have a look at verse 18 of Romans chapter 8 with me. Paul begins his sentence with the word for, which links back to the previous verse, verse 17.

He said that if we're children of God, we're going to share in Christ's sufferings as well as his glory. You'll know that Jesus went to the cross before he went to heaven.

So glory through suffering. And so in verse 18, Paul really gives us a key to this whole part of Romans 8. He says we need to turn our groaning into longings.

Have a look at what he says in verse 18. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

I don't know how many of you use the website comparethemarket.com, but I guess if you've never looked at it, it's worth a look. Particularly you can find cute pictures of meerkats on it, but you could also compare car insurance, home insurance, life insurance, travel insurance, pretty much anything you want.

[7 : 49] But when it comes to comparing present sufferings and future glory, Paul says there's no point. Don't even log on. Don't bother. It's like comparing St. Chris Basics chocolate with chocolate from Hotel Chocolat.

It's like living in a garden shed compared to Buckingham Palace. Comparing a 20-year-old Skoda to a new Ferrari. There's no comparison. However hard our present sufferings are, if we see the new creation for what it is, it's not worth comparing.

Think about J.K. Rowling. If only she could have seen then what she saw now. If only she'd known that the sufferings of her earlier life would be as nothing compared to the world-famous riches and success in the world of Hogwarts.

The reason we find it so hard to turn our groanings into longings is because we don't believe verse 18. Now I've got a set of scales here which are slightly old-fashioned but it's important to have a kind of traditional set.

So let me just... Let me get them out for you. Obviously scales these days are all digital so it doesn't quite work.

[8 : 58] But real scales are actually comparing two different weights, aren't they? You've got your weights on one side and whatever you're measuring on the other and you're kind of balancing and seeing which is heavier, which is lighter.

And so Paul says we should put all the sufferings of this present age on one side and all the glory of the new creation on the other side. And he says that they're not worth comparing.

Now I guess for most of us here if we had a kind of mental picture of scales in our mind our suffering often seems far more heavy, doesn't it? We put a lot more weight on our suffering. But that's because we've lost sight of the weightiness of glory. The word for glory in the Bible can be translated weight.

Weightiness. It's weighing far down, far heavier than all the sufferings that we could conceive of. God says that the new creation that he will make is magnificent in its perfection, infinite in its glory, weighty.

[10:06] When you're there, he says, you always won't be able to remember the sufferings of our present age. They won't be worth comparing. You'll get rid of the scales altogether. So how do we rebalance our scales?

How do we turn our groanings into longings? Well, three things. And you can see on the handout on the back of your service sheet that I want to look at this morning. Three things.

Firstly, we see that the creation itself longs to be restored to God. And that's from verses 19 to 22. Let's have a look at verse 19 with me.

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

The revealing of the sons of God will happen when Jesus returns and Christians will be seen to be sons and daughters of God. And Paul personifies the creation. He imagines that the creation is almost a person.

[11:07] He imagines the creation waiting for Jesus to return. But it's a bit strange, isn't it? Why should the creation, the soil, the trees, the mountains, why should creation be longing for Christians to be revealed?

Why should they care about Christians? Well, verse 20, Paul says, We read earlier, didn't we, in Genesis chapter 3, verse 14 to 19, that God cursed the creation.

Because of Adam and Eve, that they rejected the God who made them, they were cursed.

Childbirth would be painful, marriage would be a battle, thorns and thistles would grow, and death would come to all.

So in Romans 8, verse 20, when Paul talks about creation being subject to futility, he's talking about Genesis chapter 3. He says we live east of Eden. We live in a broken world.

It's not just us that's the problem. It's the very earth beneath our feet. You only have to turn on the news, don't you, to see the number of ways in which the world is broken today. It doesn't work the way it's supposed to.

[12:26] But there was always the hope of liberation. Did you notice verse 20? God subjected the creation to futility in hope. Always looking forward to the day when it would be liberated, set free from its bondage to decay.

The law of entropy, that kind of everything tends towards chaos and decay, it was not how God made the world, and it's not how it will end up. The creation will one day be renewed, made into a new creation.

And it's if the creation now obtains the same freedom that Christians do. Have a look at verse 21.

The creation itself will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

And Paul goes on to liken the creation as groaning in verse 22, as in the pain of childbirth, longing to give birth, longing to be restored to God.

The groaning of labour is a pain with a purpose, isn't it? Labour pains may feel like they will never end at the time. But every woman who is in labour knows that their pains have a purpose, they're only temporary.

[13:31] You will have all heard of Greta Thunberg, the 17-year-old Swedish environmental activist who's become world famous for promoting the idea of climate change.

She didn't come up with it, but she certainly has made it a much bigger political agenda. She's helped the world wake up to the fact that the creation is groaning. The ice caps are melting, the ozone layer is thinning.

The creation is in bondage to decay. I guess our actions in the last 50 years have made things much worse, but the creation has always been groaning. Because the planet is not the life-giving invincible force that we thought.

It is in decay. Now, that's not to say that we shouldn't tackle climate change. God tells us to be good stewards of the earth, so we should. But see the bigger picture here.

The creation doesn't just need to be carbon neutral. It needs complete renewal, a new creation. So imagine the creation itself longing to be renewed, waiting for Christians to be revealed when Jesus returns so that everything will be restored.

[14:40] The mountains, the trees, the flowers, the hills, the forests, they're all longing to be restored to God. If trees could talk, they'd tell you that their groaning is a deep longing for the new creation.

So, Paul says, join in with them. You're not on your own in your suffering. You don't groan by yourself. There's more going on than you realise. The whole creation is longing to be restored to God.

So how does this help us rebalance the scales, putting more weight on the glory than our present suffering? Well, by saying that the glory of the new creation is so weighty that the whole creation is longing for it.

So Paul says, join in with creation in longing to be restored. Turn your groanings into longings. Secondly, then, we long to be restored to God ourselves.

Have a look at verse 23 to 25. We long to be restored to God. Paul says, not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit grown inwardly as we eagerly wait for the redemption of our, our adoption of sons, the redemption of our bodies.

[15:58] We saw last week in Romans 8, verse 11, that God is going to give us new bodies. God has put the same power that raised Jesus from the dead in us.

Not by kind of zapping us like you would in Harry Potter with a spell, but by giving us himself, his Spirit. So if we're Christians, then the power that raised Jesus from the dead will raise us too. Perhaps you're here and you're a bit sceptical about your own resurrection, even if you're a Christian, you kind of can't quite believe it. If you don't believe it, look at Jesus' resurrection. He was the first of many.

And Paul says, we have the firstfruits of the Spirit. I don't know how many of you have been to Bluebell Hill in Kent, but in the spring, from about April to the time, it's full of bluebells, hence the name.

But I guess if we went there now, we'd be unlikely to see any. But imagine, imagine if we went there every week for the next two months, February, March, April.

[17:05] Eventually, one or two bluebells would begin to appear. And then, we'd know that a whole load of bluebells was about to appear. One or two that we saw would be a kind of firstfruits.

It would be evidence that spring is on its way. And it's the same with Jesus' resurrection. His resurrection is the evidence that spring is on its way.

That when the creation is liberated from its bondage to decay, that Christians will be resurrected. When Jesus returns, there'll be a whole load of resurrections. But, Paul says, it's not just Jesus' resurrection 2,000 years ago.

It's God's Spirit living in us today which guarantees that spring is on its way. Now, I guess there can be a lot of confusion about the Holy Spirit and how he works.

The Holy Spirit is God himself come to live in Christians. And how do we know that we have the Holy Spirit? Well, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12, verse 3, no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

[18:15] So, can you say Jesus is Lord for yourself? Well, if you can, God's Spirit is at work in you. He guarantees that you'll be given a new resurrection body because he raised Jesus from the dead.

God's Spirit himself makes us long for the new creation, especially for the redemption of our bodies. I wonder if any of you here this morning long for a new body.

I guess the older we are, the stronger our longings might become. But all of us can tell, can't we, that something's not right about the world. We're not supposed to get cancer or die young.

We're not supposed to suffer from pain or disability. This isn't how the world was meant to be. We long for a better world. And maybe you're sitting here and you're thinking, yes, I do long for a better world.

That's what I want. I'm done with all the groaning. I'm done with waiting. Where is it? Where is this new creation that God has promised to his children? Well, let's have a look at verse 24 together.

[19:20] Verse 24, 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 yet see, we wait for it with patience.

Just as God cursed the ground in Genesis 3 in hope, we were also saved in hope. Hope in the Bible is not a wishful thinking like a pipe dream.

It's as certain and secure as Jesus' resurrection itself. We've already been given the new creation, but we don't get to enjoy it until Jesus returns. If we already had it, it wouldn't be hope.

You'll know that many parents try to save up money over the years for their children, some of them even as soon as a child is born. Even a newborn baby can have a bank account and the child doesn't get the money until they're older, but it's already theirs.

It's in their name. It's completely secure. You see, it's not wishful thinking. They just have to wait for it in hope. And when the child, I don't know, perhaps turns 18 or however old it is, they get to enjoy it.

[20 : 32] They're waiting for it in hope. And it's like that for Christians. God's Spirit's already living in us. So we can say, Jesus is Lord, but we don't get to enjoy the resurrection power which God's Spirit used to raise Jesus from the dead until we're in the new creation.

But we will. We just have to wait. But I wonder if you noticed that word at the end of verse 25. We wait for it with patience.

I guess patience is one of the hardest things to learn, isn't it? Both for children and for adults. Many of us here would find it really difficult to be patient, particularly in the world of Amazon Prime and Instagram.

We want everything now. We don't want to wait. But God has saved us in hope so that we would turn our groanings into longings.

He wants us to wait for it patiently. And once you see what it is, once you see how glorious the new creation is, how much money is in your bank account just waiting for you to turn 18, it's much easier to wait for it because you know it's worth waiting for.

[21 : 41] So how does this kind of help us rebalance the scales by putting more weight on the glory than our present sufferings? Well, by knowing that we will have resurrection bodies as amazing as Jesus' resurrection body because we have the first fruits of the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead, the glory of our resurrection bodies will make the sufferings of our current bodies not worth comparing.

So we've seen that the creation itself is longing to be restored to God and that we ourselves are longing to be restored to God. We see thirdly and finally that God's Spirit helps us long to be restored to God and that's in verses 26 and 27.

Have a look down at verse 26 with me. Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what we ought to pray for but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

And he who searches hearts knows bodies the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance to the will of God. When Paul says likewise, he's basically comparing it with the first and second example.

The creation longs to be restored, we long to be restored and the Spirit longs to be restored. The creation groans, we groan and the Spirit groans.

[23 : 08] We've already said, haven't we, that God's Spirit is in all Christians so they can say Jesus is Lord and now Paul goes on to say how is it that the Spirit makes us long for the new creation?

How is it that we can put more weight on the glory than the sufferings? Well, firstly, Paul acknowledges that we are weak. Verse 26, the Spirit helps us in our weakness.

I mean, in the midst of suffering, we are weak, aren't we? We find it hard to long for the new creation. We find it hard to wait for it patiently. We often feel like we don't know what to pray. But verse 26, the Spirit helps us in our weakness.

He intercedes with groanings too deep for words. Now, some people have wondered whether these kind of groanings that Paul talks about could be Christians speaking in tongues.

But I think it's unlikely because speaking in tongues is something that only some Christians do. Paul says that in 1 Corinthians 12, verse 30. Only some Christians speak in tongues.

[24 : 09] But this is something that all Christians do. All Christians long for the new creation. It wouldn't make sense, would it, for God's Spirit to help some Christians long for the new creation, but not others.

No, instead, Paul's talking about God's Spirit giving us a deep longing, which is too deep for words, a longing to be with him, a longing to be in the new creation with Jesus, to know God fully as

adopted children.

God's Spirit helps us through the times when we just don't know what to pray, when we can't express it, we can't feel the weightiness of glory, we find it hard to believe, verse 18.

And Paul goes on to say that the Spirit intercedes for the saints in verse 27, in accordance with God's will. In other words, God's will about persevering through suffering to glory, God's will about Christians groaning being turned into longing.

I guess what that looks like for each of us here will be different, but God promises that his Spirit will go ahead of us, that his Spirit is our helper, as Jesus has said in John 14.

[25 : 16] It's a bit like being a defendant in a criminal court. You have a legal team who are all advocating for you, and they will ask you, what do you want to say? And sometimes, I'd imagine, you're not sure, but you know that you're in good hands.

Your barrister knows the law back to front, they've rehearsed all the strongest arguments in their case, and they can speak for you, even when you don't know what to say. They intercede for you, and you're found not guilty, there's no condemnation.

So what does it mean for God's spirit to intercede for us? Well, we will see next week in 8 verse 34 that Jesus himself is interceding for us.

The Holy Spirit, God the Spirit, and God the Son intercede for us before God the Father. They both say to the Father, this Christian is no longer condemned, this Christian is an adopted son, nothing can separate them from you, this person is yours.

We'll think a bit more about God's will next week as we look at verse 28 onwards, and we'll see that God's will is to get us to the new creation. But in our passage today, see that God gives us his spirit.

[26 : 33] He doesn't just kind of save us in hope and then leave us to get on with it. He gives us his spirit, guaranteeing that he will get us to the new creation, helping us to believe, verse 18, that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed.

God's spirit gives us a new desire, a new longing for the new creation that by ourselves we would never have. Imagine if we didn't have God's spirit.

What would we do with our suffering? We'd look inside ourselves for some kind of solution that we can never find. No, God's spirit helps us look outside of ourselves to look to the new creation. to be restored. The writer C.S. Lewis famously wrote in his book *Mere Christianity*, if we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we're made for another world.

God's spirit gives us a desire for another world. many of many of us here this morning are groaning, whether it's ill health, family breakdown, financial problems, job insecurity, we feel like the scales are weighted wrongly.

[27 : 50] We feel like there's too much weight on the suffering compared to the future glory. But God wants, by his spirit, to turn our groanings into longings.

He wants us to feel the weightiness of the glory of the new creation. He wants us to see that the new creation is already ours, that God's spirit guarantees our own resurrection bodies.

God wants us to turn our groanings into longings. Longing to be restored to the God who made us both now and for eternity. So where are you groaning this morning?

How are you experiencing the sufferings of this present age? How are you feeling the brokenness of a world subject to decay? Turn your groanings into longings, because the sufferings of this present age are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you so much for these words in Romans 8.

[29 : 02] Thank you for Paul's longing to help us rebalance the scales. And Father, we pray for us this morning, we find it hard, we are weak in the midst of suffering.

Help us to put more weight on the glory of the new creation and upon our present sufferings, so that we would turn our groanings into longings. And we pray this for Jesus' sake.

Amen. Amen.