

The Certainty of Future Glory

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[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 28th of October 2001. The preacher is Paul Barker.

His sermon is entitled The Certainty of Future Glory and is based on Romans chapter 8 verses 18 to 30.

We have open the Bibles at Romans chapter 8 page 919. Romans 8 verses 18 to 30.

John was a bitter old man. Admittedly he had had a very difficult life. His first wife had died, left him with young children, then his second wife had left him.

He lost his job, he started drinking too much. His war service had left him with nagging health problems as well as a deep anger at the world state.

[1 : 07] And disillusioned with life, disillusioned with God, he accused the world of there being too much suffering and hence there could not be a God who cared. On the other hand, Helen had also had not had it easy in life.

Her husband had died from cancer when he was quite young. They'd been unable to have children. So she grew up into middle age, rather lonely. At the age of 60 she was virtually housebound with arthritis.

And then having a fall that left her immobile in hospital and rehabilitation for many weeks during which time her only sister who was close to her died in an accident. But throughout all of that, her faith in God never wavered.

Indeed, it seems to become more and more obvious as the years went by. People suffer. People suffer disease, bereavement, illness, loneliness, job loss, separation, frustration, all sorts of disappointments in life.

The world is full of suffering. It's far from perfect. Most people in some sense suffer in some way. Many much more than others. But the question is, how do we respond to that suffering?

[2 : 32] Our world is fixed on the present, on the here and now. It's wanting now to be right, now to be free of pain, now to be full of joy.

And that spills over into Christian thinking as well. Too many Christians, too many sermons, too many churches think only of the here and now and what God can do now for them.

And so now, the here and now becomes all-consuming even in Christian thinking. But that's not the Bible's perspective. It's certainly not the perspective of Romans chapter 8, which we're looking at today.

For here, very much, St. Paul's eyes are fixed on future glory. See what he says at the beginning of this passage in verse 18.

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.

[3 : 36] Do you take the money or the box? A bird in the hand or two in the bush? Paul says there's no comparison.

The suffering now is not worth comparing to the glory to come. Do you take a life without suffering here and now, that's it though, it ends then. Or do you take suffering now with future glory?

There's no comparison, Paul says. Do you take the money or the box? Do you take immediate gratification, end of pain and suffering? Or do you take a life that has some suffering, but the certainty of future glory?

No comparison, Paul says. A life of suffering, suffering's pale into insignificance when compared with the future glory that's ours. A life is worth suffering for, even much suffering throughout life because the future glory that is awaiting all Christian people is so great that it's not worth comparison.

A life of suffering is worth it for the glory that is certainly coming to Christian people. A bird in the hand some say is worth two in the bush, but not when the glory that is to come is absolutely certain.

[4 : 47] And so Paul says a life even with suffering plus the future glory that is ours to come is far, far greater than a life now without suffering but that ends at death.

Paul's argument in this section of Romans chapter 8 is that future glory is certain, but also on the other hand that suffering now is inescapable, indeed necessary precursor for the glory that is to come.

Suffering is inescapable because the world is subject to it. The whole creation is subjected to suffering. Originally, of course, when God made everything, it was very good.

The last words of the first chapter of the Bible, God saw everything that he'd made and behold, it was very good. It fitted the purpose for which it was made. It did the job.

And it was full of, it was going to be full of fulfilled potential. But, we know how soon the first people failed in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve.

[5 : 53] And not only was their sin disobeying and distrusting God, not only was a result of that their expulsion from the Garden and now a remoteness in their relationship with God as we saw last week, but also as a result of their sin.

The whole creation was now subjected to futility or frustration. Thorns and thistles will grow up. By the sweat of your brow you will have to work. There will be pain in childbirth and so on.

It's a result of the original sin of Adam and Eve. The whole creation suffers because of that initial human sin subjected to frustration or futility.

Paul reflects on that when he says in verse 20 here, the creation was subjected to futility. That is meaninglessness or a lack of fulfillment.

It's purposeless. It's frustrated. It's unable to achieve what it's meant to achieve. It doesn't quite fit together and do what it's meant to do. It's a bit like something that sort of works but doesn't quite work.

[6 : 57] Something that works with lots of straining and effort. I remember on my old computer the mouse that's the bit for those who don't know much about computers that is the arrow that you can point around the screen.

It wouldn't work and I'd go like this trying to get it to work and eventually it would. It wasn't quite working well. That's sort of like the creation since the fall of Adam and Eve. Some bits of it work well.

Some bits of it work erratically. Some bits of it are beautiful but by and large it's frustrated and it doesn't perfectly fulfill what it's meant to fulfill.

But notice too what Paul says in verse 20. The creation was subjected to futility not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it.

And he doesn't mean they're Adam and Eve through their sin but he means God because ultimately God is in charge and God is sovereign. God is the one who subjected the creation to futility.

[7 : 56] We might think well that's the result of Adam and Eve's sin and at that level we're right. But at a bigger level with God's sovereignty in mind God had it in mind to subject the creation to futility.

Why would he do that? Why did the sin of Adam and Eve have to spill over into the rest of creation and cause such frustration and problems for all of us who've ever lived since?

God did it in hope Paul says at the end of verse 20 in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

Why did God allow this to happen? Why does God allow suffering in this world? To create hope to create an expectation of the glory that will be received by the children of God and as we'll see a bit later on ultimately for our good and conformity to Jesus.

As a result then this state of frustration and futility is not permanent. That's what Paul's saying at the end of verse 20 into verse 21. It's not going to be like that forever.

[9 : 06] It's subjected to futility and frustration but in hope of something better of the glory of the children of God. Therefore Paul has said in verse 19 the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God.

It is looking forward to the end of this futility and frustration to something better to glory to future glory and the idea of eager longing here is actually a very evocative word originally.

It is a word that used of somebody who's standing on tiptoes craning their neck to see something good. It's the word that you'd use if you were at the airport awaiting a loved one coming out from the international customs area and there's a big crowd there waiting for the jumbo jet so there's lots of people waiting and you're standing there and you're on tiptoes trying to look through when those doors open to see if you can see your loved one inside waiting to come out.

That eager longing expectation for something good to happen. It's the word for standing on tiptoes when you're seeing a street procession with a superstar or the queen or a sports hero or somebody coming down the road and there are people in front of you so you're jumping up trying to see something good.

That's what the creation's doing. It's waiting with that eager expectation on tippy toes if you like looking for the glory that is coming to end the futility frustration evil and suffering that this world is currently subjected to.

[10 : 29] It is eager yet it is patient. An odd combination in part of that word because often eagerness is impatience. We're so eager for something that we just can't wait for it to happen like a child who's counting the number of sleeps to Christmas already but it's patient yet eager because sometimes patience loses its eagerness.

We give up waiting we think it's going to happen one day let's just keep on living. It is both eager and patient as it awaits the glory of the revelation of the children of God. In the aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York there were just a handful of survivors plucked from the rubble and ruins the very next day or later that day.

The trapped people have told how they groaned to try and be heard by the rescuers and the groanings alerted the rescuers to people who are still alive.

In one sense the groans save them. We're told here that the creation as it eagerly awaits the glory that is coming groans. Paul says in verse 22 we know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now.

The groans are not complaints or whinges. It's not as though this world is complaining to God saying why are we like this? It is a groan of expectation. A groan that is suffering but is looking forward to the end of suffering and the arrival of glory.

[12 : 01] And Paul likens it here to labour pains. A woman who gives birth groans in labour through the pain and through the suffering. It's not particularly a complaint because there is an expectation of the glory of the arrival of a child.

They say that the pain of giving birth is excruciating something thankfully I'll never have to go through but then it's astonishing how many people have more than one child. Why is it when the pain is so excruciating?

Because the joy of the child far outweighs the pain of childbirth. Surely. And sometimes people say they even forget the pain when the joy of the child comes.

And that's the analogy Paul uses here for the creation. It is groaning in pain and suffering awaiting the future glory and when the future glory comes it will be incomparable to the sufferings now. They're not worth comparison.

Because the joy of future glory is so great that suffering now will be all but forgotten when we arrive in future glory. So the suffering of this world is more than worth enduring for the sake of the glory to come.

[13 : 13] But not only does creation groan so do Christians groan. So Paul goes on to say in verse 23 and not only the creation but we ourselves groan who have the first fruits of the spirit we grow inwardly while we wait for adoption the redemption of our bodies.

Now what prompts Christians to grow? The Holy Spirit inside them. Now that's an odd thing because all too often in Christian thinking these days you hear of the Holy Spirit's results being love and joy and peace and happiness and excitement about being a Christian and life that's now relatively easy and so on.

But my friends the arrival of the Holy Spirit inside you creates groaning not grinning necessarily. You might think that's an odd thing for the Holy Spirit to do but the reason why the Holy Spirit inside us creates groaning is because all of a sudden we realise how lacking we are how incomplete this life is and how much more there awaits us because the Holy Spirit is what's called here first fruits if you like a foretaste of the glory to come a little guarantee or deposit if you like a little sampler of the glory that is yet to await us in heaven.

The Holy Spirit you see is wetting our appetite for heaven for future glory. He is making us salivate for the glory that is coming. Our mouths watering is a result of the Holy Spirit inside us.

The Holy Spirit is a bit like the smell of a roast lamb cooking. That is it gets your mouth watering and you can't wait to eat the fullness of the meal. At the moment you might if you're lucky just get a little sample and you certainly get the whiffs of the smells of roast lamb cooking but it creates an eagerness awaiting for lunch or dinner or whatever it is.

[15 : 01] That's the work of the Holy Spirit in us to cause us to groan to salivate to have our mouths watering for the glory that is to come. He's a little sampler of that glory but just a foretaste a first fruit if you like of the glory that is to come.

And Paul has said what we're waiting for is adoption the redemption of our bodies. We're already adopted we saw that last week the spirit himself is the spirit of adoption or sonship but that will be finally complete when we inherit as the children of God the glories of heaven again as we saw in beginning last week the redemption of our bodies because our bodies now though we in a sense are already redeemed through Jesus' death our bodies still are subject to decay through sin and evil and suffering in this world so we are awaiting that glorious day when we will finally and publicly be revealed as the children of God receive our heavenly inheritance and our bodies will be redeemed and sin's presence eradicated once and for all and the Holy Spirit is causing us to groan for that day wetting our appetites for the glorious perfection of heaven that is an essential dimension of Christian faith one that's underplayed far too much in modern Christianity which lives too much for the here and now and hope gets evacuated from Christian faith so Paul goes on in verses 24 to say for in hope we were saved that is our salvation which is already realized now but is not yet fully complete we've yet to receive all the benefits of our salvation but in hope we are saved in hope of heaven he's talking about of glory in hope we were saved now hope that is seen is not hope for who hopes for what is seen that is we've yet to see God face to face we've yet to see heaven but if we hope for what we do not see we wait for it with patience the same idea of eager longing that was there earlier on in verse 19 now God doesn't just leave us then in this world with the Holy Spirit wetting our appetite for the future glory and say hang on be patient the Holy Spirit also offers us further help here and now in this world that is fallen and full of suffering so one of the dilemmas that we face as Christians especially when faced with suffering is how to pray do you pray for healing or do you pray for endurance through suffering do you pray for an end to trouble or do you pray for endurance and growth through trouble it's not always easy not always obvious to understand and determine the will of God in such a situation but we're not left to fend for ourselves in such a situation so Paul encourages us and reassures us in the next little paragraph that the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness for we do not know how to pray as we ought but that very spirit which is within us remember intercedes with sighs too deep for words that is the spirit groans creation groans

Christians groan the Holy Spirit himself groans with sighs too deep for words and God who searches the heart knows what is the mind of the spirit because the spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God Paul is not saying don't pray let the Holy Spirit do it no far from that he tells us time and time again in his letters as Jesus did also in the gospels that we ought to pray at all times but what he is reassuring us is that when we are not quite sure about how we should pray or whether something is the will of God or not pray but be reassured that the spirit himself inside us is interceding for us and praying for us and that is good because God will answer those prayers so even now in a world full of suffering and confusion frustration and futility the spirit helps us to pray according to God's will that ought to be an encouragement because sometimes you hear it said that God's will will not be fulfilled or cannot be fulfilled unless we pray right but Paul is saying here that God's will will be fulfilled even when we don't pray right even when we don't pray or we pray too weakly because of our ignorance or our misunderstanding

God's will is not thwarted by our inability to pray properly nor of course is it thwarted by suffering in this world Paul's reassurance here goes on into the next verse a famous verse but infamously abused and applied we know that all things work together for good and that's where most people end the verse all things working together for good that is every cloud has got a silver lining she'll be right mate cheer up it'll be okay that's fairly bland optimism really but it's certainly not what this verse is about this verse actually limits that sort of understanding notice what it goes on to say we know that all things work together for good for those who love God not for anybody and everybody but for Christian people people who love God who it's also described as those called according to his purpose that is people who in response to God love him and people from

God's end are called by him according to his purpose it's a double barreled way of describing Christian people all things work together for good for Christians Paul is being silent about other people but things may not work together for good for them but secondly this verse does not promise comfort ease healing end of problem for those who love God either because that's how this verse is often abused as well God works everything together for your good so cheer up because your sickness will go or your job loss you'll get another job or things will be better tomorrow that's not what this verse is about what Paul is saying here is that all things work together for your good not your comfort or your ease and thirdly he says that all things work for your good not just some things not just the things that obviously look to be good but even bad things suffering and evil things God without condoning evil uses evil amongst other things to work good for his people the greatest example of course is the evil of the crucifixion of Jesus in no way did God even hint at condoning the evil indeed the harshest words of judgment in the Bible are reserved for

[21 : 51] Judas who betrayed Jesus leading to his death God didn't condone that evil but out of that evil he brought great good for which you and I are beneficiaries and recipients and even from the act of evil terrorism God will bring good for Christian people if your car is stolen from that evil act God will bring good for you not your car returned not lots of money in compensation for it necessarily but what is good for you God will bring from any act anything anything at all that happens in life good or bad and the same we could say for the good things that happen when you get a windfall or a job promotion or something great happens for your life God will work good for you you may think well that is the good but no not necessarily God will work good for you through all things some years ago a girl dived into a lake for a swim instantly she knew something was wrong she had thought the water in the lake was deep but it was shallow and she hit her head on the bottom and became a quadriplegic but her accident led to her conversion and future

Christian ministry and she wrote on reflection of that accident that God permits what he hates to achieve what he loves God didn't love an accident that would lead a person to be a quadriplegic but he permitted what he hates to achieve what he loves bringing a person not only to Christian faith but being more and more conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ the name of that girl is Joni Erickson her book is a Christian bestseller for the last 20 or so years if you've not read it I encourage you to do so my guess is it will be in the library and Kathy's nodding that it is Paul goes on in the last two verses of this section to explain the good that God brings from all people he does so in a chain of five things an irresistible unbreakable chain of five things the purpose of these this chain is to assure us of future glory glory and that nothing not even suffering or our own weakness will in any way impede the arrival of that future glory the first step

God foreknows us those whom he foreknew verse 29 begins what does it mean for God to foreknow some people leave this fairly empty of meaning and say well God knows in advance who's going to choose him who's going to be a Christian so he chooses the ones who he knows will down the track choose him so he sees a person and says well they're not going to choose me I'm not going to choose them but I know that down the track they'll become a Christian so I'll choose them that's not what it means at all God's not God if that's the case but God's knowledge of us is establishing a relationship that's how the idea is used consistently in the Old Testament especially so when God knows Israel it means that he's chosen to establish a relationship with the people of Israel so Paul here when he uses the language of those whom he foreknew it means God before we ever existed before the foundation of the world decided to establish a relationship with us as Christian people the second step is also prehistory those whom he foreknew he also predestined that is beforehand before we even existed

God determined our destiny predestined he determined our destination that is that we would one day share in the glory of heaven with him God determined that when he decided to establish a relationship with us centuries and millennia ago he also determined our destiny to be the glory of heaven but in particular Paul describes that destiny in verse 29 and here in a sense he's describing what is our ultimate good from verse 28 he also predestined us to be conformed to the image of his son that is simply to become more like Jesus not in looks and physical appearance obviously but in character because that's what is our good and that's what God determines for us that we become like Jesus that we become compassionate and merciful like him that we become humble and godly like him and that's why we focus so much on

Jesus in part to become more and more like him that's our good that's what God wants of us that is how he's working all things for us not for our ease and prosperity and healing but that through the situations of the world in which we live this fallen confused frustrated and futile world that out of suffering as well as out of good things we should become more and more like Jesus Christ and not only an individual but notice how the end of verse 29 says in order that he might be that Jesus might be the first born within a large family God wants lots and lots of people to be like Jesus not just us people of any age every race every tongue every language every people group every nation he wants a huge family of people who are like Jesus in their character and that means you and me he wants us to be like Jesus Christ the third step now puts all of this into plan in history before history

[27 : 56] God foreknew us established a relationship with us he predestined us to a destiny of being like Jesus in glory and then in history in our own lives he called us not just a general invitation as God does he invites the whole world to come to Christ but when he calls somebody they come he places their hand and he picks them up into a relationship with him we might think I'm a Christian because I chose to be it's my decision but ultimately that's not true it is God's decision and he brought it into effect in our lives he determined it before we ever existed before the creation existed but in our lives through various means sometimes obvious sometimes not he has called us to practice that relationship with him I see that very much in my life I think in some ways I became a Christian when I was about the age of 12 fairly ill formed but as I look back it was never really my decision I just knew that God was on me it is

God who brought me into a relationship with him not me that walked into it and God has called us into a relationship with him and the fourth step is that we're justified we've seen in Romans 3 and 5 that that means that we are declared righteous through the death and resurrection of Jesus for our sins our sins are gone paid the penalty on the cross and so we're declared righteous in a relationship with God those four steps are already over if we're Christian people we've been foreknown by God predestined by God called by God and justified by God through Jesus death and resurrection and the purpose of the chain is to say that if four of them are true already the fifth is definitely true notice even that it's in past tense those whom he predestined he also called those whom he called he also justified and those whom he justified he also glorified not he will glorify one day which is what we might expect but past tense because it is so definite and so certain that we should have no doubt about it at all we fall short of

God's glory we saw that in chapter three but we are glorified that is the link that leads on to glorification it depends on Jesus work for us and that's happened it's definite and therefore glorification is certain for us in the future as well our lives one day will be transfigured by the glory of God will be conformed to the likeness of Jesus will be like him in ways that we cannot even imagine now our character will be perfected once people so to be glorified is not just that our lives are transformed and glorified into the conformity with Jesus but that we will see God face to face in his presence as we have never experienced here on this earth and there is nothing better than this sometimes people think that heaven is just sort of a great pious religious experience that is not particularly exciting let me tell you it's better than that no crying there no tears no pain no death there no sin there no evil there no loneliness frustration or broken relationships no problems of the futility and frustration of this world no waiting on the phone in endless queues for the bank or anything like that either this will be a perfect place we will be perfect all of

God's people will be perfect in the conformity to the character of Jesus Christ and there immediately in the presence of God seeing him face to face we will dwell in glory for eternity and it will never be spoiled that future glory is so stunning so stupendous that any suffering we undergo now on this earth is not worth comparing to it don't become like the man I mentioned at the beginning and become a bitter person through suffering in this world but suffering is meant change to become more like Jesus in preparation for the glory of heaven no wonder Paul said in chapter one that the gospel is powerful to save because Jesus death is not just to forgive us and leave us in this life now but Jesus death is the essential power that guarantees our final glorification on that day when he returns and we are raised in glory like he has been raised in glory already from before history to the end of history this five point chain stands firm for us as

Christian people before we even existed in this creation existed God placed us on the glory train and that glory train will not fail to reach its destination no evil will derail it no sin will stop it no suffering will delay it no lack of prayer will slow it down no ignorance of God's will will be an obstacle on its tracks in fact nothing in all of creation as we'll see next week can force that train to stop or force us off that train that is how certain we are and should be of arriving at the destination of a glorious inheritance of heaven now let me tell you if you don't already know I'm a pessimist at heart I come to church expecting nobody to come this week and it means that every week I'm pleasantly surprised but if I come expecting hundreds and hundreds of people every week like a supreme optimist then I'll probably mostly be disappointed so every time I go to a football game I expect my team to lose it means that just occasionally

[33 : 43] I'm surprised but never very disappointed when people tell me about a film or book that is just fantastic to see or read so high that they get disappointed too quickly it doesn't matter how high your expectation of heaven is it will exceed them you will not be disappointed you think of what is the best that you can imagine it will be better still it will be far better than anything we'll ever experience even the heights of euphoria and joy on this earth fleeting though they are heaven will be better and it will last forever so wait for it eagerly with patience be eager crane your necks to glimpse it savor the foretaste of the holy spirit in your lives ache for that final day of rising to glory with Christ my friends that glory must be our heart's longing we are to long for glory we are to long to be like

Jesus we are to long to be in the presence of God face to face for eternity we are to long for total freedom from sin and the decay of this world but in the face of suffering here and now we are to ooze hope in a world of despair we are to make our suffering feed our yearning for glory we are to let the suffering that we endure here shape us more into conformity of Jesus Christ as Charles Wesley wrote in that great hymn which we'll sing later on finish then your new creation pure and spotless let us be let us see your great salvation perfect in eternity changed from glory into glory till in heaven we take our place there to cast our crowns before you lost in wonder love and praise amen