

Sure Hope of Glory

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- [0 : 0 0] Let's pray. God our Father, we thank you for your word to us, your powerful word that makes us wise for salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Powerfully work your word into our hearts, we pray by your spirit, that we may be glorified ultimately in your presence through Christ.
- Amen. John was a bitter old man. Admittedly, he'd had a difficult life. Brought up in a Christian family, keen Christian member.
- First wife died, relatively young age, leaving him with young kids. Later on, his second wife left him. In the end, he lost his job drinking too much.
- His earlier war service had left him with nagging health problems and quite a deal of anger. And in the end, he died disillusioned with life, angry with God at all the suffering that he'd endured.
- [1 : 0 5] Helen, on the other hand, had also not had it easy. Her husband had died young from cancer. She had no children. By the age of 60, she was virtually housebound with arthritis.
- And then a fall had left her in hospital for weeks, recuperating. There was no one in her house to look after her, so she spent a long time in rehabilitation. During which time, her closest person on earth, her sister, had died in an accident.
- But throughout all of that, her faith in God never wavered. People suffer. All sorts of people suffer.
- Christians suffer. Non-Christians suffer. Whether it's disease, bereavement, malnourishment, poverty, illness, loneliness, job loss, frustration.
- The world is full of suffering. It is far from perfect. And many of us here suffer in all sorts of different ways. Suffering is almost unavoidable.
- [2 : 2 0] But how do we respond? With bitterness? Or hope-filled faith? If our fixation is on this life, today, here, now, then our fixation will be on healing and ease of pain and ease of the suffering.
- Too easily, we sometimes will expect too much, though. We'll demand too much of God or of life or of our employers or the government wanting to ease the pain here and now immediately.
- And when that doesn't eventuate, it creates deep bitterness and deep disappointment within. And even in popular Christianity, the here and now is often all-consuming.
- It's the focus of many Christian songs. It's the focus of our prayers. It's the focus of our fellowship. The here and now matters most. But it's not the Bible's perspective.
- It's not the Bible's worldview. And St. Paul, in this passage today in Romans 8, directs us to a certain but future glory.
- [3 : 3 0] I consider that the sufferings of this present time, whatever they may be, whether it's sufferings for being a Christian or just the general sufferings of being part of a fallen world, both are included in this passage.

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. Do you take the money or the box?

That's the sort of dilemma of quiz shows and other things like that. Is a bird in the hand worth two in the bush? Paul says there's no comparison.

The sufferings now are worth nothing by comparison to the future certain glory yet to be revealed.

If there were uncertainty about future glory, that would be a different matter. If future glory was not quite guaranteed, likely but not certain, then the sufferings now are by comparison worth a lot more in the weight of comparison.

[4 : 42] Before I went to Bible college, I was an actuary. What that means is that I would calculate when you're going to die, basically, and how much you need to pay for insurance. That is, in a sense, what money is worth to you in insurance.

And so \$10 now might actually be worth taking compared to \$1,000 in 10 years' time because I may not be here in 10 years' time to take it.

So you sort of weigh up what is worth now having compared to the future. And the future is so uncertain. So it actually sort of plots when you're likely to die. That is, the mortality rates for different people and so on.

But we're not dealing here with an uncertain future. We're dealing here with a certain future glory. And therefore, Paul says, the sufferings now, however deep they are, whether they're as deep as Job's suffering, which Jono quoted before, they are worth nothing by comparison to the certain future glory that is to be revealed.

Glory is certain in the future, and suffering now is inescapable. That's the sort of equation that Paul is dealing with in tonight's passage.

[5 : 57] And suffering is inescapable because this world is fallen. This world, this creation, is subject to decay. As this passage says it, from which the song we've just sung derives its words and lyrics.

So Paul says in verses 19 to 21, the creation, that is the whole universe that we live in and are part of, waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God.

For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but by the will of the one who subjected it 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.

This world is subject to decay. It's futile. It's frustrating. It doesn't deliver the goods. Suffering is inescapable. Perfection is illusory here on earth.

That's the world that we live in, folks. But future glory is guaranteed and certain. See, after the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, the good world, the very good creation that God saw and had made in Genesis 1 began to be decayed, corrupted, like getting a virus into a computer beginning to go awry.

[7 : 15] And our whole universe is wrought with the frustrations in a sense of the virus of sin. From the very first sin, it's worked its way and wormed its way into all the universe and creation in effect.

It's subject to decay and suffering is the inescapable outcome of that. It's futile, verse 20 says. That is, it's meaningless. You might put in a huge amount of effort into something and it comes to naught because creation is frustrated now.

It's unfulfilled. It's dissatisfying. It's unable to function as it ought. And yet, over and above all of that, God is sovereign. He is the one who subjected it to decay.

That is, the original sin and the original evil was not outside the sovereignty of God. He allowed it, permitted it, even foreordained it. Why?

Why would God do such a thing? Why doesn't God just make the universe perfect to start with and keep it perfect? for the sake of greater glory. Verse 20 says that God subjected it 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.

[8 : 39] The greatest glory will come because the earth was subject to decay and will be released from that bondage to decay. That is a greater glory than if the world had been made perfect and stayed perfect forever.

The greatest glory comes through the eradication of that decay which comes through the power of the cross of Jesus Christ. So Paul says here we are in the midst of a world subject to decay and we wait.

We wait with eager longing verse 19 says along with the creation we are waiting for the revelation of the children of God.

That is the freedom of the glory of the children of God at the end of time. Literally the idea of waiting is not just sort of sitting dozing in a doctor's surgery and just sort of thinking oh well you know time is ticking by.

It is one of those waitings that is eager and anticipatory. It is the waiting of somebody at the international terminal at Tullamarine. When you are waiting for somebody you haven't seen for years.

[9 : 49] Your parents your children or the best friend and so in there in the throng of people waiting the jumbo jets pouring out of people out of those sliding doors at Tullamarine you are standing on tiptoes wanting to see if you can see can I see the person that I am waiting for.

That is the eager anticipation and longing that is captured here in these verses. It is craning your neck to see standing on tiptoes. It is the sort of waiting and longing that the fans will have if they queue outside a concert hall or outside the Oscars ceremony or the Logies or whatever it is wanting to see their hero their star.

It is the eager longing of the football fans who are outside the dressing rooms after a game wanting to get the signature of their heroes. Eager anticipating looking around full of activity eager longing but it is patient waiting for the future glory that is yet to come.

If you remember back to September 11 six years ago nearly a handful of survivors plucked from the ruins of the World Trade Center and the surrounding buildings that were destroyed.

The trapped people groaned when they heard the rescuers approaching. The rescuers heard the groaning in a sense the groans save them and that happens in catastrophes from time to time.

[11 : 13] Here we are told in verse 22 that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now. Not the groans of a whinge or a complaint.

That is it is not the groans of mumbling saying why has all this happened to me. These are the groans that are looking forward to the fruit from suffering. They are labour pains. That is it is the groans of a pregnant woman who is not complaining about the pains but rather groaning in anticipation of the joy of a new birth that is on its way.

Sometimes they say it is well people say that it is very painful to have a child. I am not quite sure how to imagine that. I have been told that it is a pain comparable to kidney stones which I have had but without the joy of children at the end of it all.

I sometimes wonder if it is so painful why go for another child? I mean so many people have more than one. Are they just forgetful? No I suspect it is because the joy of children is worth it.

They may not always think that. but so too the suffering of this world is worth enduring for the joy or glory that is to come.

[12 : 39] Now not only does the creation groan as verse 22 says so do to Christians not only the creation verse 23 but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the spirit that is we believers we Christians groan inwardly while we wait for adoption the redemption of our bodies.

Notice the connections going on here. The anticipated glory is the revelation of the children of God. The bondage to decay will give way to the freedom of the glory of the children of God verse 21 as well.

Now it's waiting for adoption to be children of God verse 23 three. You see people often and this is unusual people expect the Holy Spirit to give us a real buzz to be a sort of spiritual ecstasy and to give us joy and peace and calm to somehow give us a spiritual adrenaline rush but here the work of the spirit is to make us groan groan inwardly waiting for adoption because the Holy Spirit in us is first fruits as it's described here it's a little sampler a taster of the glory to come it's an anticipation and it makes us groan with longing for more please sir can I have some more is what the Holy Spirit is making us groan and it's wanting us to have more because of the frustration we saw in chapter seven the things I want to do I don't do the things I don't want to do

I do do who will rescue me thanks be to God who gives us the victory through Jesus Christ the Holy Spirit is the sample of the victory of Christ in us so we're longing eagerly for that final victory to be perfected and fulfilled within us in effect the Holy Spirit is this first fruits the foretaste of future glory the guarantee therefore of future glory is not a sample of something that may not eventuate it's the down payment of something that is certain to come and it whets our appetite for glory the Holy Spirit in us makes us salivate for the fullness of all the salvation that is brought to us through the Lord Jesus Christ the Holy Spirit shows us our current incompleteness and imperfections making us groan for the perfections and the glory that is certainly coming it's like the smell of roast lamb cooking makes your mouth water hardly waiting to eat it and have more or the lemon tarts of God's promises as I used that illustration a few weeks ago in a morning service that is it's making us want more and therefore groaning with frustration yes at the fallen world that we're part of but groaning in hope for what is certainly coming at the end of history so the result of the work of the spirit in us is to make us grow to make us long and yearn for the fullness of the promises of God in Christ and that's an essential dimension of

Christian faith this is this is not an optional extra verses 24 and 5 in hope we were saved now hope that is seen is not hope for who hopes for what is seen but if we hope for what we do not see we wait for it with patience but more than this this passage is not just about hope even now God helps us in this fallen world for example in prayer it's not always easy to know what to pray it's not always easy to know how to pray do I pray for healing or not for example when we're ill but we're not left to fend for ourselves entirely either the work and help of the Holy Spirit also helps us in our weakness verse 26 for we don't know how to pray as we ought but that very spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words sighs or groans creation groans we saw in verse 22 we groan in verse 23 the spirit groans here in verse 26 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 this ought to be an encouragement to us

[17 : 18] God's will for us is not thwarted by our ignorance of it we may not know what to pray because we may not be sure of God's will in a particular situation the spirit helps us nor is it thwarted by our weakness to pray most of us are not good prayers both in the length of prayers or time we spend praying or in the content of our prayers but the Holy Spirit helps us and nor of course is God's will for us thwarted by our suffering for the content of this or context of this passage is our suffering in a fallen world and there in the midst of a fallen world with all its frustrations and futilities and sufferings we may not be able to see out of its morass to know what to pray but the spirit who is the first fruits of the future glory helps us groaning with sighs too deep for words in our souls and spirits in prayer from that

Paul moves to one of the most famous verses in his writings we know that all things work together or God works all things together for good for those who love God who are called according to his purpose it's a famous verse but a much abused verse some people say well all things will work out for good that's what this verse is about every cloud has got a silver lining always look on the bright side of life in that banal Monty Python song she'll be right mate cheer up it'll be okay tomorrow's a new day it'll be fine what sort of hope is that that's pathetic hope it's hopeless that's not what this verse is about at all this verse firstly applies to Christians to believers the spirit we know that all things work together for good for those who love God that is believers into whom

God's spirit has poured out God's love into our hearts earlier on in this chapter we read those who love God are those who are called according to his purpose so the context of this verse is not for anyone and everyone it's not tomorrow's going to be a better day it's for believers and it doesn't promise personal happiness or comfort or ease it promises good good may be in the midst of suffering and pain and unease and dis-ease it may be in times of sadness and grief not in times of joy so this this passage doesn't necessarily say tomorrow will be better but rather good will come by God for the believers in the middle of all things even bad things even evil things unjust things sinful things it doesn't say that God condones evil but that he brings good from it the evil of the crucifixion brings salvation to many the evil of terrorism may bring good for Christians the evil of theft or illness or crime might actually bring good for believers but what is the good doesn't necessarily mean our benefit or our prosperity or our health or the end of our suffering the chain of verses 29 and 30 point to what our good is there are five irresistible and unbreakable links in this chain it's meant to be seen that way it is a sequence of one through to five and starting at one guarantees arrival at five you don't stop halfway the purpose is to assure us of what the good is and that it is certain even in the midst of a fallen suffering decaying world step one the beginning of verse 29 for those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son

God foreknows too often this is understood simplistically and wrongly as God knowing in advance how people will respond oh yes God does know in advance how people will respond but that's not foreknowledge and some think that God knows how we're going to respond and therefore in a sense he chooses those who respond in faith if that's the case God is not God he just is able to see the future to know is to have a relationship God foreknowing is God establishing a relationship with us before we even exist a relationship in advance foreknowing before we were born before we were created indeed as Paul says in Ephesians 1 God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world before you even get to page 1 of Genesis 1 in the whole

Bible God had chosen us in Christ to be believers he didn't choose us because we'll be religious or faithful or good but in fact as the Bible keeps telling us Christians are weak utterly dependent on God he foreknew us because he foreknew us there's no other reason there's nothing in us that warrants that choice there's nothing in us that provokes that foreknowledge from him it is completely his free initiative God establishes a relationship with us before the foundation of the world secondly and tied to it he predestined us verse 29 again those whom he foreknew he also predestined that is he established their destiny in advance again before the creation of the world we might well say what is that destiny to be conformed to the image of his son that is to be more like

[23 : 38] Jesus to be Christ-like in our character not in our power not that we'll all run around being little messiahs but that we're Christ-like in character in godliness humility in meekness in love and that's the good that comes out of the suffering that comes out of all things of verse 28 God works all things for good for those who love him what does it mean that in the crucible of suffering in the crucible of life God is making me more like Jesus that's good it may not mean an end to suffering his life on earth ended in suffering and death but a better thing is not an end of pain not an end of futility on earth but he's being made more like Jesus that's why we suffer if we're believers that's the point of living in a fallen world that's part of the greater glory

Jesus being God's son the suffering of this world for believers will make us more like God's son so that when we're adopted in God's family we bear the family likeness that's the revelation of the children of God that's the glory that's anticipated back in verse 20 and 22 and so on God wants a large family of Christ like people see the how verse 29 continues that we may be conformed to the image of his son in order that he might be the firstborn Jesus might be the firstborn within a large family you see Jesus is God's only begotten son eternally begotten in heaven there aren't any more there won't be any more but God wants a large family and he does that by adoption and he adopts us to be like Jesus in character and he shapes us into

Christ likeness through our life on earth through the sufferings and pains and the futilities and so on on earth we might shy away with that and abandon hope and become bitter and faithless and hopeless in which case we're not called by him but if we are true believers then all those things that inflict us on earth the good and the bad let me say all things verse 28 says will make us more like Jesus step three firstly it was foreknown predestined thirdly in verse 30 and those whom he predestined he also called that is putting into action in history the prehistory choices and decisions of God he foreknew us and predestined us before the creation of this world and now in history in our lives on earth in the 1970s or 80s or 90s or the 2000s or whenever

God decided to act in history to bring about the completion of those earlier decisions he called us as believers he called you and he called me to belong to him to respond with faith this call is an effectual call he doesn't call us and we may refuse the nature of calling here is that it's effective in us he called us and we responded it's a work of his grace in Christ and then the fourth step that leads from that verse 30 again those whom he called he also justified that is as we've seen back in Romans 3 and Romans 5 he declares our sins forgiven he acquits us of our sins he declares us righteous in Christ because of Christ because of what Christ has done for us in atoning for our sins on the cross we are therefore brought into God's family Christ like in

God's sight if not in full practice Romans 3 tells us the basis of that the death of Christ Romans 5 begins to draw out the fruit of that the peace and the access that we have to God the Father through Christ steps 1 2 3 and 4 in this chain have already happened for believers we are already foreknown already predestined already called and already justified if we are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ they already happened in history they are certain steps 1 to 4 of this unbreakable chain have already happened past tense if all 4 have happened the 5th and final step is certain it's also here in the past tense but to demonstrate the certainty of it we have been or I mean yet to be but those whom he justified he also glorified we need have no doubt about our final destiny if we're believers we fall short of

[28 : 57] God's glory now through our sin Paul argued that in Romans 3 all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God we fail to make the grade but here is this great promise that we who are believers in the Lord Jesus because of his work for us on the cross we are glorified well glory is an odd word it's a strange word really where would you begin to define what glory is in the Old Testament the Hebrew equivalent word is often associated with the presence of God it has a moral connotation sometimes but the word has got a sense of weight of heaviness about it of value we tend to use the word glory in normal speak whenever we do which is not all that often perhaps to think sometimes of something that's dazzling or light bright glorious and sometimes we use it in the connection of fame or honour somebody receiving some esteem or accolade or something like that the promise of glory sums up all the promises of

God to be glorified is to be finally in the presence of God freed from our sins to be glorified then is moral perfection in the presence of God shining in purity and light and truth rather than walking in darkness and to be glorified is also to be honoured or esteemed or praised by God that's an odd concept to think about as though somehow God will glorify us aren't we there to glorify him and yes that's true think how much we long for and yearn for praise the child desiring praise from the parent mommy daddy look what I've done isn't you know look what I've made might be a mess but they want praise the student wanting praise from the teacher the sports person wanting praise from the crowd the actor wanting the accolades from the audience and so on how much greater ought to be our longing our yearning for praise from

God well done good and faithful servant you see to long for praise from God is not an arrogant thing or a boastful thing which we might initially shy away from that idea God says that he wants to be able to say at the end of our lives well done good and faithful servant that's the praise that we ought to covet not the praise of humans that will distort our values so much and is so fleeting so shallow so forgetful but rather the praise of almighty God that is far more enduring and far more substantial this will never be praise for our achievement it's not a boastful coveting of the praise of God God look at what I've done haven't I been great I've pastored this church I've preached this sermon I've led this small group I've done this that's not the praise of

God that we ought to covet that's a boastful arrogant praise of God we fall short of the glory of God in our own strength and even as Christians we know as the chapter 7 says what I want to do I don't do what I don't want to do I do do glorification like all the preceding steps derives from and depends upon the grace of God's initiative in the Lord Jesus Christ the end of the chain glorification is only made possible by the work of Christ in justifying us only the powerful cross of Christ is able to take us to the final certain sure glory of heaven it's only the powerful cross of Christ that makes us into the likeness of Christ that we are revealed as children of God because we are like Christ in our character but that praise of God that glory from God at the end which is our eternal destiny satisfies our deepest longings so often that longing we channel the wrong way into something fleeting short shallow forgetful human praise that's what our world's praise is like you think of all the contrived circumstances to praise people on our earth all the lengthy arduous tedious boring ceremonies and halls of fame and award ceremonies that go on and on and are so trivial and mundane and fleeting and who remembers them it shows the heart's longing for praise a longing that we need to channel towards

God and not to human beings future glory is both certain and will resound for eternity think of it like this an artist displaying his masterpiece I don't know whether you've ever done something really good that you just are filled with excitement about I'm not sure that I ever have although I do remember a couple of mathematics equations at university that I got out first time and I thought yes I've done it but it might be some performance or some skill or some exam or something that you've done a masterpiece that you can look at and delight in think of the joy that a virtuoso gets from a great concert performance the glory that we're destined for is like this Christ is the master and we are his masterpiece we will be like him on that final day and that is an astonishing achievement if you know my heart you will wonder how it will be at all possible and if I knew yours

[35 : 38] I'd think the same no disrespect intended to imagine you and me like Christ on the final day is beyond comprehension in a way but on that final day God the father will see in us the work of his son he will see in us masterpieces and he will say to his son well done and he will delight in us at the brilliance of Christ's work in us it's not our achievement it's not our boast it's Christ's work in us but we will be glorified we will receive the praise of the heavenly father on the day when we're revealed as the children of God because we will be like Christ there is nothing better than this there is nothing better there's nothing more certain than this for

Christian people there's nothing more satisfying than this so satisfying will that be that all the sufferings now pale by comparison there's nothing more lasting than this you think of the last great football achievement or cricket achievement in a year's time it'll be forgotten in 10 years time it'll be forgotten it's so fleeting so transient the accolades on earth but that will be deeply and eternally satisfying the heavenly glory that is our destiny all the earth's pleasures pale by comparison no wonder you see Paul wrote Romans no wonder he wrote Romans because this gospel is so glorious no wonder he wrote Romans because he knows we fall short of the glory of God but God's glory will come to us nonetheless because of the glorious work of the Lord Jesus Christ what a glorious gospel no wonder he writes about it at such length and so frequently in the

New Testament no wonder he never tired of preaching it because the glory that is ours derives from the glorious cross of Christ from before history began before you and I were a twinkle in our parents eyes before they were a twinkle in their parents eyes and I could go on generation for thousands before any of that ever happened we were on the train bound for glory we were placed on it before the creation of this world and that glory train will not fail to reach its destination with us aboard no evil will derail it no sin will no ignorance of God's will will be an obstacle to it on the tracks in fact nothing in all of creation can force us off the glory train neither heights nor depths nor powers nor things present nor things future will fail to stop the glory train with us aboard arriving at our destiny the glory of

God for eternity I must confess I'm a pessimist I often expect the worst and it comforts me that I do I never expect my football team to win and when you're a Richmond supporter that's a relief it means I'm sometimes rarely but sometimes pleasantly surprised you see I seek to avoid disappointed hope by being a pessimist hope so often seems to disappoint in this world high expectations often come crashing down I read a book someone recommends I think oh it's not so good I see a film or see a play it's not so good I've learned to temper my expectations so that I'm a downright pessimist let me tell you that the highest expectation that you can imagine that you can dream that you can conjure up will not be disappointed on this final day heavenly glory will be far greater far better far more lasting far more deeply satisfying than anything you can dare to imagine here on earth now don't be conned into thinking this is as good as it gets here now on earth it's not it's fleeting and fading it's futile and frustrating it's decaying and there is far far better to come and it will be far more glorious than anything you can imagine and it's certain imagine the best you can it will be better imagine the greatest glory that you can it will be more glorious imagine the greatest satisfaction that you can and it will be more deeply and lastingly satisfying so wait eagerly for it with patience crane your necks to glimpse it thank God for the Holy

Spirit to give us a foretaste of it so that we salivate for it more and more and long for it and ache for that final day dear friends that glory must be our heart's longing Christians are to long for the heavenly glory that is certain sure guaranteed for us there is no doubt about it the glory train will arrive with us on board we are to long for moral perfection like Christ we are to long for the freedom from sin and decay that this glory promises we are to long for being revealed as the children of God adopted into the likeness of Christ by the cross we are to long for being in God's presence face to face we are to long for the praise of almighty God well done good and faithful servant and even in the midst of the suffering of this world even in the midst of its decay and frustration and futility we are to ooze with hope in a world of despair we are to make suffering feed our yearning for glory that we don't decay into bitterness we are to respond to any suffering in fact to anything with growth in Christ likeness we are to be conformed more and more to the image of God's son as we wait for the glory of the revelation of the children of

[42 : 01] God let our prayer be Charles Wesley's hymn 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 2021 let us hanya ■-----