

New Life: Integrated Not Separated

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 March 2011

Preacher: Canon David Short

- [0 : 0 0] Our Father, we pray now that you would take our minds off all those things that distract. As we come to this magnificent passage, we pray for two things, for light and for love.
- We ask for light, that you would shine the light on your own glory in the face of Christ. We pray too that your Holy Spirit would pour your love into our hearts even as we hear.
- We ask this for the glory of your Son. Amen. Please sit down. Now if you'd open your Bibles please to Romans chapter 8, page 944.
- As you do that, while Dan was speaking here to the children, there was a little girl, a gorgeous little girl, and every time Dan came vaguely close to saying something that was good and right and true, she stood up and went...
- Actually, she stood up and put her hand up and went like this. Anyway, I thought we'd do that this morning. Although, this passage is such a rich passage you'd never sit down.
- [1 : 1 6] And I think it's deservedly one of the two or three favourite passages amongst Christians. I don't like saying some part of the Bible is better than the other, but this is so full of treasure, it's worth learning by heart.
- Chapter 8 hangs between two thundering declarations. No separation from the love of God. Sorry, that's the last one. At the beginning he says, no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
- No condemnation. And at the end he says, no separation from the love of God in Christ Jesus. But in between, there's no shallow, empty triumphalism.
- The Apostle deals with the two things that most cause us trouble as Christians. That are most likely to give you despair, and are most likely to make people abandon their Christian faith altogether.
- And it's the struggle internally with sin, and the struggle externally with suffering. See, things go pretty swimmingly in the chapter, until about verse 17, and then boom!
- [2 : 2 6] We're only heirs of God, provided we suffer with Christ, in order that we may be glorified with Him. And then the Apostle reels out all sorts of different kinds of suffering in this life.
- Our own inner darkness. The ferocity of rejection, attack, injustice, persecution. The fact that we live in a world marked by decay and death, and bodies that are marked by increasing pain.
- And here is the problem, you see. At the heart of the Christian Gospel is the message that Christ has come and He has defeated sin, and He has defeated death. And that all of us who belong to Him by faith have been freed from the law of sin and death, but we still sin.
- And we still die, and we still grow older, and our bodies fall apart. And when someone dies, the thing is you cannot tell any difference between a Christian corpse and a non-Christian corpse.
- We are being led to glory, but many of us struggle in futile jobs, in seemingly frustrated and in fearful circumstances.

- [3 : 39] And so what does the Apostle do? He says we must, the fundamental issue is that we must get the past, the present, and the future straight. If we don't get the past, present, and future straight as Christians, the Christian life will be unbearable and unworkable.
- And you know, so much of evangelical Christianity today is embarrassed about what the Bible says about the future. We lop off the future. We're so desperate to be relevant, we put all our eggs in the basket of now, this life, this world.
- There are lots of churches that preach, this can be your best life now. Jesus can make you a winner. Because we want glory now, now, now. It is literally a hopeless form of Christianity.
- Because the Apostle labours for us to see that the centre of gravity for the Christian is the future. Yes, we have the Holy Spirit now, but in verse 23, he's called the firstfruits.
- We do not have the harvest yet. All the fullness of the Spirit that I may have in this life is merely the firstfruits. We're children of God. Although we've been adopted, we are heirs.
- [4 : 59] We wait for our full inheritance when Christ appears. The whole creation is caught up in the cycle of decay and death. And we wait for that day when our bodies will be redeemed and the glory of Christ will shine from within us.
- And as it was for Jesus, so it will be for us. The order of our lives as Christians is suffering now and glory then. Not full glory now, though there is some glory.
- And glory then. Did you know salvation in Romans is always future? And I think we need to hold these things together.
- Through our life and our union with Jesus Christ, we have been brought to a new hope. That's the basic thing that happens to us. And our lives now are larger. Our hopes and our desires, they transcend this world.
- But we're not immune from the pain and intensity and agony of suffering and of sin, even though neither we know will have the final word. This is very important for us west coasters.
- [6 : 04] If you're someone who says, I just live for today, I just live for the present, you cannot be a Christian. And Jesus says, you're a fool. In the Garden of Eden, Satan cast doubt on the past, did God really say?
- He denied the future, you will not die, in order to focus solely on the present, on what seemed to delight the eyes. That's how sin works.
- Satan is only interested in the now, how things seem today. And that's what it means to set the mind on the flesh, to just focus on now. Nothing chokes the word of God better than focus entirely on the present and cutting off the future.
- Remember the parable of the sower? Jesus said, the seed that fell on the rocky ground, they're those who hear the word of God with joy, but have no root in their hearts. They believe for a while, but when trouble and persecutions come, they fall away.
- Or the seed that is choked by thorns are those who hear the word of God. But as they go on, they're choked by the cares and the riches and the pleasures of this life, and they bear no fruit.
- [7 : 16] So the apostle wants to lift our eyes. As we move through to the end of Romans, the verbs move into the future. He doesn't want us to ignore the presence, present, sorry, but to bring us into the hope and joy of God's perspective.
- So I want to make two points. The apostle makes kind of two very big points. The purpose of God and the love of God. And so from 26 to 30, we have the purpose of God.
- And what Paul does is he takes a massive telephoto lens to our situation and he begins tightly close up and then he goes way up to the highest place into the mind of God and gives us a quick history and overview of eternity.

Are you ready for that? Would you like to stand up and nod? No, no. Okay, we begin close up with our weakness. Our weakness. Our weakness. Verse 26. Likewise, the Spirit now helps us in our weakness.

We do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings, too deep for words and he who searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

[8 : 37] Weakness is a great word and it perfectly sums up all that the apostle has been saying. We live in weak bodies. We're weak spiritually. We struggle with sin, with stubbornness, with our own creaturely decay and with suffering.

We're so weak that even in the most basic matter of the Christian life, prayer, we are completely feeble.

I mean, why is prayer so hard? Why don't I pray more? Why doesn't God seem to answer? Why doesn't it get easier? Why do those Christians who've been faithful and on the path for 80 years testify to the same thing?

Well, as we know from the rest of the chapter, part of my weakness is that while sin dwells within me, the Holy Spirit also dwells within me at the same time.

And the Holy Spirit does not pop in and out depending on when I've been naughty or nice. I hope you don't think the Holy Spirit leaves you when you sin or when you're weak.

[9 : 50] The Holy Spirit abides in me even when I sin. It's a miracle of grace. He helps me to put to death the deeds of the body, which is what it means to be led by the Spirit. To be led by the Spirit has nothing to do with guidance.

It has to do with conflict with sin. But here is another ministry of the Holy Spirit in my prayer, present ministry, where He intercedes. And I don't think intercede is a good translation, frankly.

The word should be translated intervene. It literally means running up against something. It could be a good something like a really great book that you want to share or it's been used to run up against crocodiles.

But it never has the idea of pleading, of supplicating, of entreating. It's not that the Holy Spirit prays for me.

You know, Lord help David, he's really weak today. It's He prays in me. He intervenes in my heart, pouring into my heart the unspoken desires, giving me a desire to pray to God and for the will of God.

[11 : 06] The Holy Spirit comes alongside and He shares, listen to this, some of the burden of my own weakness. He pours Himself into my heart the desire to pray Thy will be done.

You ever prayed Thy will be done? You ever wanted it? That's from the Holy Spirit. At the end of verse 26, this is not praying in other tongues.

It's not a special prayer language given to some. It's wordless. It's unspoken. It's a desire. Literally, the Holy Spirit Himself intervenes in wordless groans.

And God, the heart searcher, knows my inner being. He sees my desires and my intentions which have been planted by the Holy Spirit and He loves them. Like a painting by my little boys when they were younger, some of which I've still got and I can't tell you what they are.

I love them. The Holy Spirit helps us here to pray according to the will of God. What is the will of God? Well, now Paul goes up and takes a very wide angle and he does this in three stages.

[12 : 22] The first stage, verse 28, very familiar verse. We know that for those who love God, all things, well, God works all things together for good for those who are called according to His purpose.

All things, all things, not some things, all things, not somehow they just, it'll all work out in the end, but God Himself works them.

Not just the things that are easy and pleasant, but the things that are grueling and grinding and unjust in which we suffer. God does not abandon us to our afflictions and suffering, but He works them for good.

He doesn't work them for our comfort and our ease and our prosperity, but He works them for our good in an absolute sense. And what is this good?

Well, it's the second step, verse 29. For those whom He foreknew, He predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son in order that He might be firstborn among many brothers.

[13 : 26] So, step one, His God works all things for good. What is that good? Step two, God is making us become like Jesus Christ, conformed to the image.

That is why, that is what God is doing in every one of our lives right now. In the great things, in the difficult things. He is conforming us to the image of His Son.

That's why suffering is not a waste for a Christian. Instead of harming our salvation, it promotes it because it makes us more like Jesus. That is God's purpose. You ask, what's the will of God for me? It's to become like Christ.

But the third step is God's ultimate purpose. And it's that last phrase in 29. And that is that Jesus Christ might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

God's purpose doesn't terminate on you or me. It terminates on the glory of Christ. And the reason why He's transforming us into the likeness of Jesus Christ is so that Jesus Christ might be, the word means preeminent, firstborn, supreme among many brothers and sisters.

[14 : 40] I find this incredibly liberating. That God's purposes are not ultimately about you or me. See, the reason for our salvation is not just that we'll be forgiven and share His glory and live eternally, but that Christ will have God's children around Him in fellowship and freedom in a new creation perfectly reflecting the glory of God and the image of Christ in our own different ways.

And I think it's amazing that Jesus should even want us as His brothers and sisters or God should want us as His children. Do you know the book of Hebrews says, He is not ashamed to cause brothers and sisters.

He does not need us. He has eternal fellowship with the Father and the Spirit. But because of the overwhelming generosity of His grace, not only has He created us for glory, but when we traded that glory away for other things and set our hearts on idols, He has redeemed us and in Jesus Christ, He has made us new and brought us into the new creation.

And that's freeing because all that God is doing in you and through you is not just for your sake, but it's for the sake of Jesus, His only Son.

And in the midst of my weakness and my suffering, you may doubt God's commitment to you, but you cannot doubt God's eternal love and commitment to His Son.

[16 : 11] And that means your salvation and my salvation is part of a bigger thing which God will most definitely achieve. That's why Paul finishes this point on the purpose of God by taking us up to 50,000 feet.

Gives us a quick, brief history of eternity from God's point of view. And just cast your eyes down, please, on verse 29 to 30.

The story of the universe in five stages of what God does to achieve His purposes. God foreknew us, God predestined us, God called us, God justified us, God glorified us.

Now, lots of Calvinist commentators love these words. And when they come to these words, they import their entire theological framework in one moment.

And you can understand why. There's two references to predestination here. And the word foreknow does not mean that God knew beforehand who would choose Him and then chose them.

[17 : 20] It means foreloved, forechosen. But this five-fold chain is not really about election or predestination.

We come to that in the next chapter. It's about suffering. And let me read you some words from John Calvin's own commentary written in the mid-1500s on this verse.

He says, See the point Paul is making.

that foreknowing and predestining and calling and justifying and glorifying are all part of one thing that God does to bring many sons and daughters to glory around Jesus Christ.

It's one group of people. Those, those, those, those who before knew Hebrew, those, those, those. Nobody who is justified was not predestined.

[18 : 30] Nobody is called who will not be glorified. It's good, isn't it? So in the middle of our weakness and sin and suffering our salvation is God's initiative and the certainty does not just, just rely on the promise of God although that would be enough but it ultimately relies on his purpose and dedication for his own son.

That's why I think glorified is in the past tense. It's, it's absolutely certain. So as we move from the, the purpose of God to the love of God Paul begins to celebrate and verses 31 to 39 are like a hymn where the apostle gathers everything up, everything that's been going on from chapters 1 to 8 and he celebrates the incomparable and eternal and inseparable love of God for us in Christ Jesus.

verse 31 what then shall we say to these things if God is for us who can be against us?

Is that how you think about God? Is God for you? Is he on your side? Does he take your part out of his own free love? There's no power that can turn his love aside.

God is for us who can be against us? Well actually there is quite a lot against us isn't there? I'll look down at verse 35 look at this list tribulation distress persecution famine nakedness danger these are all things Paul endured including the sword finally it's a terrible list here's the apostle Paul who used to hunt Christians for a living and try to kill them and now he has become the hunted he's writing to Rome where things do not go well for Christians in the following years and you know of course this has only increased since that time I mean yesterday's newspapers mentioned hundreds of Christians who've been killed since January this year usually reported under the slightly misleading title of religious violence it's now estimated that over 170,000

[20 : 59] Christians our brothers and sisters who are alive today will be martyred this year they will be put to death for being Christian in the 20th century it's estimated some 45 million Christians were martyred and we probably haven't faced many of these things these are things that would cause us to despair and throw up our faith but Paul is completely honest about it he doesn't dodge the bullet that's remarkable as in so many other places in the Bible we find the cruelest and darkest and most evil things brought right up face against the most brilliant glorious and lovely things who can be against us what's the answer to that verse 32 he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all how will he not also give us with him graciously give us all things how do you know someone loves you by what they're willing to go through for you or give for you by far the most precious thing for God was his son his own son as Paul says here

God gave him over to a gruesome death why? because he loved us that was by far the most difficult thing God has ever done it's way easier for him to now give us all things in the future if we belong to him he didn't hold back his precious son his love has not changed all things are ours in Christ Jesus what that means is that the poorest most put upon persecuted Christian brother or sister in prison for their faith today possesses everything in Christ but you see it's not just suffering that threatens our security it is our own sin isn't it?

so 33 he says who can bring any charge against God's elect well who is to condemn? well I think every Christian struggles with the feeling of being condemned and if you don't you're not really battling against sin I mean Paul himself in chapter 7 called himself a wretched man but who is to condemn he asks now and he gives two answers two simple truths he says it's God who justifies the judge of all the earth he's already pronounced the sentence of righteous who dares speak over the judge on that final day and the second fact is the person of Jesus Christ as you see in verse 34 and he says Jesus died he's made final payment for my sin he's raised broken the power of death he's seated at God's right hand he has all authority in heaven and earth and he intercedes the same word his very presence there intercedes it doesn't mean

Jesus kneels down and prays for us and says oh please please please father go easy on them don't hurt them as in nasty God nice Jesus the very fact that Jesus is at the right hand of God guarantees there's no condemnation because God's deepest wish is to glorify his son by bringing many sons and daughters to him for eternity his very presence there is our intervention and therefore if anyone brings a charge against a Christian they have to first void the cross of Christ they have to overpower the resurrection they have to take on the one with all authority and power they have to overthrow the throne of God and the gates of hell don't stand a chance to do that no wonder he says who shall separate us from the love of Christ and I think the reason in verse 36 he quotes from Psalm 44 is that the fury and terror and threat of persecution is nothing new for the people of God

Psalm 44 is written by faithful godly believers who suffer because they're faithful godly believers and it sometimes comes as a bit of a shock to Christians when things turn against them when we're not universally loved or liked you may not have faced famine or physical danger or beatings for Christ although I know some people in our congregations have we are surprised when a friend or a family member turns against us or is ashamed of us and cuts us out of their social circle in subtle ways because of what we believe but if the love of God is what we were made for if the love of God is better than life itself if the glory that we share with Jesus is eternal and joyful then verse 37 in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us it doesn't mean we care less and are passive and fatalistic it doesn't mean that in this life we just hold our breath pie in the sky and we wait and wait and wait it doesn't mean we don't feel the pain it doesn't mean we get a cape and a costume and leap tall problems in a single down we don't conquer over our difficulties but in them in these things through Jesus Christ the love of God is enough for us and more and now in these last two verses 38 and 39

[26 : 37] Apostle stands back and gives us a cosmic list of the most terrifying powers that can confront us just have a look at them it's very interesting isn't it he begins with death death can't separate us from the love of God I heard an interview this week David Suzuki interviewing Margaret Atwood about the afterlife very sophisticated cynical interview Suzuki fawned over Atwood's every word and at the end Margaret Atwood said well of course nobody has ever come back from the dead so we just don't know well actually one has the son of God who loved us and gave himself for us I just the gravity of this passage is so much I wish we could spend time praying it in I want to tell you personally how important this passage was to me I struggled for many years I think I said this before as a bit of a Pharisee and a legalist and it took until my third year in seminary for me to have a complete 180 degree turn in my life and this was one of the two passages God used to do it

I doubted I didn't ever doubt of God but I doubted whether I was really a Christian I doubted whether I was good enough and I'd try hard and I was hopeless and I'd look at my love wasn't good enough and I wasn't faithful enough and I wasn't sure I was going to persevere and when I read this chapter I came to see that what's really important is not my love for him but his love for me what's really important is not my faithfulness but his faithfulness it's not my perseverance it's his perseverance it's not my hold on him it's his hold on me and my performance and your performance goes up and down you know it's two steps forward five steps back six steps forward you know it's like that but we remain secure because all of the doing of salvation is on his side and the reason he's telling us this is because he wants to bring us into the joy of God he wants us to rejoice in the love and assurance of God and his purposes so if you're struggling with sin or if you are suffering ask God this as he promised in chapter 5 ask him to pour his love directly into your hearts by the

Holy Spirit and in your sin and in your suffering lay hold on God's love for you and say with the psalmist I'm always with you you hold me by the right hand you guide me with your counsel and afterward you take me into glory whom have I in heaven but you and earth has nothing I desire beside you my flesh and my heart may fail but God is the strength of my life and my portion my contentment my sufficiency the perfection of happiness forevermore let's pray let's kneel and pray great