

Saturday Evening Service

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[0 : 00] Written by God's grace and under God's inspiration because as Christians we often lack assurance and doubt the truth of the gospel for two main reasons.

These are the reasons Paul deals with in these central chapters in Romans. Firstly, the ongoing battle with temptation and sin in the Christian life.

And that was our subject last evening. Wretched man that I am is Paul's conclusion at the end of chapter 7. Wretched man that I am says the great apostle.

And to him and to us, Romans 8 says, verse 1, There is no condemnation, no guilt, no penalty for sin for those who are in Christ Jesus.

So in the battle with temptation and sin, our doubts are dismantled and our confidence built up. And then he says, chapter 8, verses 2 through 9, The Holy Spirit that indwells you has liberated you, has set you free in the very heart of your being from the power and the sovereignty of sin, so that you no longer walk according to the flesh with your mind set on what is sinful.

[1 : 45] But fundamentally you walk according to the spirit with your mind set on the spirit of life.

And that indwelling spirit that has liberated you from the very power of sin is leading you on a road that one day when you have a resurrection body will free you from the very presence of sin.

Now tonight, Paul deals with the second problem. And that is the problem of suffering and death in the Christian life.

The Christian gospel is a gospel of life and of peace and of immortality. To set one's mind on the spirit is Paul's description earlier in Romans 8, is a life of peace.

That's what he says. And yet as Christians, then when this letter was first written, and now we have to square that with suffering and death.

Suffering because we are Christians, the opposition we face for our faith, the pressure of feeling marginalized and different than minority, perhaps acutely for a younger generation.

[3 : 19] And the suffering we experience as Christians living in this world like everybody else, suffering that comes from sickness and from death.

All around us, within touching distance of us all, behind every door in this town, behind every door, whether it is a Christian door or the door of a non-Christian, there is suffering and death in the end. And there is no difference, apparently, between someone who is a Christian and someone who is not a Christian in terms of the effects of living in this world of suffering.

Christians, as well as those who are not Christians, get sick and they die. As Christians, does God really love us?

Is it true that nothing, nothing, can separate us from the love of God in Christ? Now, as I prayed, perhaps there are some people here tonight really feeling this deeply.

[4 : 52] You are suffering as a Christian, suffering from opposition or intensity within your family, perhaps, or suffering with sickness, or dying, or watching someone you love suffer.

Let me just pause and footnote for us at this point that the gospel, the gospel that you and I believe in, the gospel that is in your heart by the indwelling Holy Spirit, speaks articulately and powerfully right at that point of real life.

Now, if that is the problem, suffering and death, what is Paul's answer? Well, his answer is in verses 14 through 30 as we read.

The first part of the answer, and as Ivor said when he introduced me tonight, and I was glad he did say that, that we are flying at 20,000 feet over Romans 8, like an eagle, and we'll swoop down from time to time.

So much here. The first part of the answer to the problem of suffering and death is in verses 14 to 16, and these wonderful verses that remind us who we are, that we are children of God.

[6 : 20] Verse 14, For all who are led by the Spirit of God, that is Christians, are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, Abba, Father.

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. Now, these are marvelous verses. To be a Christian, is to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

When someone is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, or as Paul describes the indwelling spirit in verse 9, the Spirit of Christ, when someone is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, we receive the Spirit of Sonship.

By him, by the Spirit of Sonship, we call God Father. And who else calls God Father?

The Lord Jesus. So, it is his Sonship, the Sonship of the Lord Jesus, we participate in him.

[7 : 39] And that Aramaic word, Abba, Father, is intimate. It is an expression of dependence, of reliance, of trust.

And the Spirit himself testifies with our spirit, bears witness to the fact, or keeps on telling us again and again, even now, that you and I, if we are in Christ Jesus, are no less than children of God like Jesus.

verse 17. If we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may be glorified with him.

Paul calls Christians heirs. Now that is a mind-blowing statement again. It is a marvellous truth.

Now don't let this truth that you've heard before just bounce over your heads. Just listen again to what Paul is saying with a freshness. Because you and I, if we are in Christ Jesus, our children of God, we are fellow heirs with the Son of God of his inheritance, of his glory, of his everlasting kingdom that is the world to come.

[9 : 30] A glorious inheritance. And it is guaranteed. How is it guaranteed?

Well, why are we heirs with Christ? Because we are children of God. How are we children of God? Through the spirit of sonship. Why are we indwelt by the spirit of God that is our sonship and our adoption? Because Jesus died.

Because Jesus died. It always, and can only, come back to the cross like an unbreakable line.

Why are we heirs? Because we are children. How are we children? Because the spirit of sonship lives within us.

[10 : 32] How does the spirit live within us? Because Christ Jesus died and was raised. It's a wonderful thing to contemplate that we are heirs.

but here's Paul's point in this passage. If you are in Christ Jesus, you are an heir to Christ's inheritance.

But not yet in terms of our experience and receiving of it. look at what Paul says, if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may be glorified in him.

And there is a picture for the Christian of life in this world suffering. There is a now and a not yet of Christian experience. The now is suffering.

and the not yet is glory. The now is suffering. The not yet is glory.

[11 : 53] That is the pattern of the Lord Jesus. And in the verses that follow, Paul elaborates on this theme of the now and the not yet.

The suffering now and the glory to come. and he teaches us how we are to live in the now with the not yet in view.

Before he does that though, he kind of, to use a golfing term, stands on the team and says something very helpful in verse 18.

He says, for I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed in us.

Paul invites us to consider the sufferings of this present time, of living in this age, of living in this world. He says, consider, consider them, the opposition, the sickness, the sadness, the tears, the death.

[13 : 04] Consider them. Consider them. And then consider the glory that is to come. And then compare the two.

The glory that is to come is so glorious and so wonderful that it overwhelms by sheer weight of glory the sufferings of this present time, hard as they are for the Christian, the sheer weight of glory, bears down upon us, bears down upon us with the assurance in us through the Holy Spirit, and

testifies with our spirit that we are children and heirs of this weight of glory.

now let's consider the now and the not yet. First, verses 19 to 22. Paul focuses our minds on the creation.

Creation groans in hope. Verse 19, 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.

[14 : 35] For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. Now that's a summary of Genesis 3. The world God created was perfect.

Adam and Eve rebelled. The consequence of that rebellion, God's response was to curse the whole of creation. As humanity fell, all creation under humanity was dragged down to.

And creation, the world that we live in, is groaning. Environmentally, it is groaning. Economically, it is groaning. And morally, it is groaning.

Globally, I could give you many statistics. I won't. Globally, the number of reported weather-related natural disasters has tripled since the 1960s.

Every year, these disasters result in 60,000 deaths. Malaria, one of the world's greatest killers.

[15 : 42] two billion people are likely to be exposed to malaria by the 2080s if climate change continues as it is.

And so on and so forth. Whatever you take on these statistics, and there are many more, creation is groaning.

But groaning and futility and frustration in the creation in the world we live in is not the end of the story. Verse 21, the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

And Paul is speaking here about a restored creation, what the Bible calls the new creation. Listen to this from Revelation 21. I saw a new heavens and a new earth. Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man.

He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them and their God in these marvellous words. He will wipe every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more.

[16 : 47] Neither shall there be mourning or crying or pain anymore for the former things have passed away. What do you think the new creation will be?

It's this world, this world that we live on resurrected. This planet earth resurrected. A real, physical, resurrected earth.

A little bit like Lewis or Harris. Ivor took me today to see the Calendish stones.

and Carlway and Barvis and these beautiful places as you look out on the ocean. In this, one of the most beautiful parts of Scotland, let me emphatically impress upon us all that the new creation will be nothing like Lewis or Harris because there is even here frustration and decay and mourning and crying and pain.

The creation will be resurrected but not yet. For now, it is groaning environmentally, economically, morally and verses 23 to 25 so are we.

[18 : 37] Verse 23, not only the creation, in other words, it's not just the creation that groans but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the Spirit groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies for in this hope we were saved, 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.

We have the first fruits of the Spirit but we still live with fallen mortal bodies. One day they will be redeemed setting us free from all physical and moral weakness from suffering and the ongoing battle with sin but we're not there yet and as we wait we groan.

The groaning we go through as we suffer or as loved ones suffer. Do we not groan? All of us know what it is to groan.

Whether ourselves or watching others who suffer. As a minister I often visit people in hospices.

The last time I visited someone in the Marie Curie hospice in Edinburgh I walked through the doors and these words of Romans came to my mind we groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons.

[20 : 05] Hospices are remarkable places but there is no place there is no ground there is no need for such a place in the new creation for God will wipe away every tear and death shall be no more.

we ourselves who have the first fruits of the spirit groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons the redemption of our bodies.

Verse 24 For in this hope we were saved. Now Paul is saying two very important things in verses 24 and 25.

Firstly he is reminding us that the hope we have as Christians is future and not present. The new creation is not here yet. We do not have resurrected bodies.

Our experiencing now is suffering. Glory then. There is a realism about what Paul says that steadies us. But Paul also strikes a note of hope in these verses.

[21 : 22] And that is just as important a note to strike as realism. But we need to beware of lapsing into a defeatist historical mentality.

The hang on and grind it out till glory. There is nothing worse than someone who keeps telling you that life is wonderful. There is nothing worse than a Christian who keeps telling you that life is wonderful.

hope. But equally there is nothing worse than a Christian who says life is all gloom and doom. For there is hope.

Hope of glory. Hope of life eternal. And that is sure and certain hope. Notice what Paul says in verse 24 for in this hope we were saved at the cross of Christ.

Realism about what life is like and hope for the glory to come. What do you get when you fuse realism and hope? You get patience. Verse 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

[22 : 42] The creation groans as it waits for the new creation. We groan as we wait for our resurrection bodies and the new creation. We groan in the journey.

We groan as we wait. We groan as we wait patiently. Who else is groaning? Who else is groaning with us and the creation?

God is groaning. God groan as we groan as we do not for us. We do not know what to pray for as we might.

But the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans too deep for words. 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.

God and what these verses are saying is this that the Spirit of God groans with us. The creation is groaning for its redemption. We are groaning in the present time as we hope for glory and the Spirit is groaning with us.

[23 : 55] God is groaning. The Holy Spirit is bearing the struggle with us. The Holy Spirit that is within us. Paul talks about not knowing what to pray for as we might.

He talks about those occasions in our lives as Christians when the storms of life are at their fiercest and keenest and we feel we just don't know what to pray even we cannot pray.

Maybe you watch someone suffering with an illness that you love very much. What do you pray for them? That they will be healed?

That they will have strength to endure? Or that God will take them home? You don't know what to pray. You feel that you hardly have the energy or strength or capacity to pray when we find ourselves as Christians in such circumstances.

The Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we might, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans too deep for words.

[25 : 23] As we groan in the experience of our suffering, the Spirit groans, praying to the Father on our behalf.

Now that is wonderfully comforting, but the Holy Spirit that God himself is not for a moment indifferent to the sufferings of his children. God cares.

God knows the Father who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

The Spirit and the Father are one. God knows the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit always prays for us in accordance with God's will. The prayers of the Spirit are perfectly in line with the Father's will.

He knows what to pray for us and that is a huge comfort to us. Now finally, verses 28 to 30.

[26 : 42] And these are marvellous verses of assurance and confidence for us as Christians. How would I title these three verses 28 to 30?

Something like this. God's sovereignty on the road to a guaranteed glory.

I wonder if you've heard verse 28 used glibly. or casually. Well, here it is from God, from the Holy Spirit who intercedes for you, who groans with you on the road home to glory.

We know, we know that for those whom God loves, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

All things work together for their good. There are no accidents, there are no coincidences in the Christian life.

[28 : 05] In all things, God works. there is no day in your life as a Christian, there is no hour in your life as a Christian, for God is not sovereign.

Nothing is pointless nor haphazard. All of your life is within the compass of God's providence, and all of God's providences are good, sometimes bitter, other times sweet, but always good.

God's plan for our life, verse 29, for those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first born among many brothers.

God's desire for you and I, if we are in Christ Jesus, is that we are brought into his family as brothers and sisters of the Lord Jesus, and conformed day by day into his very likeness until the day we are fully like him with resurrection bodies.

That is God's plan for us. And then this great verse 30, God's plan for us is to bring us safely home to glory in the new creation.

[29 : 51] And those whom he predestined, he also called. And those whom he called, he also justified. And those whom he justified, he also glorified.

Before the creation of the world, we were predestined for salvation. In time, God calls us to himself through the word of the gospel. And when we put our faith in Jesus, we were justified.

And the final step is for God to glorify us. But notice the tense that Paul uses. the God who called us is the God who justified us.

And those whom he justified, he also glorified. Past tense. It's not yet happened, but it's happened because it happened at the cross.

That's his point. I enjoy watching mastermind on television. I normally get six.

[30 : 59] The person who wins normally gets 34. You know the famous line in mastermind? I've started, so I'll finish.

What God has started in your life, he can only finish. Let me finish with an illustration.

I said earlier on that there is no difference between a Christian and someone who is not a Christian in terms of living in this world of suffering and death and its effects.

And in one respect there is no difference between someone who is a Christian and someone who is not a Christian. But in every, every respect in truth there is a world of a difference.

Think on it like this. two bodies lying in a mortuary, a Christian and someone who is not a Christian.

[32 : 23] They both had their ups and downs in life. They both groaned. They both died of cancer. And there was plenty of groaning and tears.

deep down in their hearts and their souls. And there they both lie, dead in the mortuary.

What's the difference? For they look the same. The Christian groaned in life in hope.

the person who is not a Christian groaned with no hope. The Christian assured by the Holy Spirit knew they were a child of God.

They knew God as Father. The person who is not a Christian knew nothing of God in any real or personal or intimate way.

[33 : 40] The Christian waited patiently for glory knowing that the sufferings in this present time were nothing compared to the weight of glory that is to come.

The person who is not a Christian desperately hung on to life and would not face death for there was no hope of eternal glory.

The Christian has a Saviour and a brother Jesus Christ. The person who is not a Christian has no Saviour.

The Christian walked through the valley of the shadow of death with a gentle shepherd. The person who is not a Christian walked through the valley of the shadow of death utterly alone.

The Christian has an eternity in a new creation. The person who is not a Christian has an eternity in hell.

[35 : 05] Let's pray. Father, we want to thank you tonight that for those in Christ Jesus that is these compassionate parts of your word to help us, to strengthen us in a journey home to glory, that in a

world of suffering and death there is great comfort to be found in the fact that we are children of God and heirs of a glorious inheritance and that all around us the creation is groaning for that inheritance but one day it will be liberated and redeemed.

We are groaning and surely we know what it is to groan and yet we groan in hope we groan in hope of a resurrected body and a resurrected earth and Lord thank you thank you that the Holy Spirit when we run out of the ability even to pray groans with words that are too deep to express and conforms our lives perfectly to your will and we thank you that the journey that we have begun will be completed because Christ has died and was raised

Lord as we contemplate these things if we sit in this room and are not in Christ Jesus Lord cause us to see the need of the forgiveness of our sins and lead us to turn to Christ and lay hold of him find forgiveness and find hope in this life and find the sure and certain confidence that comes from navigating through this life with the spirit indwelling us the spirit of Christ and with the confidence that when death comes as it will to us all it will herald resurrection to everlasting life in a new creation

Lord by your spirit and in your mercy help us not to tarry long at the point of faith and yield to the conviction of the Holy Spirit for life and for eternity we ask all of these things in Jesus name Amen