

Romans 8:18-21

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Preacher: Nick Lauer

[0 : 0 0] Good morning, church. We are looking at Romans chapter 8 again this morning. We're going to focus in on verses 18 through 22. Let me invite you to turn there with me in the Pew Bible, Romans 8, verses 18 through 22.

The page number is in the bulletin if you need help finding that. We're going to look closely at these words this morning, so it'll be helpful if you have it open before you. Romans chapter 8, verse 18.

As we come to God's Word, let me pray for us. God, as we've just sung, we pray that you would, by your Spirit, give us a posture of humility now as we come before you in your Word.

Lord, like Isaiah the prophet many years ago, we acknowledge that before you, our holy God, we are an unclean people. We are unclean in our lips, unclean in our hearts.

God, only by your grace are we cleansed. So, as we come to your Word, we thank you for the grace that allows us to have ears that are open and hearts that are soft before you.

[1 : 1 6] We pray that your Spirit would take these words that you've inspired and that He would bring them like a gardening tool deep into our hearts to dig up that earth and sow good seed there, that it might bear much fruit in our life as a church.

Thank you for working, God, in our midst. Thank you for being faithful to us, your people. Thank you for not abandoning us. Thank you for giving us this moment when you, God, speak to us.

Give us ears to hear. We pray for Christ's sake. Amen. Amen. So, Romans chapter 8, we're going to pick up, we're going to begin in verse 16 to catch some of the context for our sermon passage this morning.

Let me begin in verse 16. The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. And if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

[2 : 3 8] 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 glory, the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

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

For in this hope we were saved. A 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.

So, there are some passages in Scripture where you are allowed to step back and take in the whole view.

There are some moments in the Bible where you get glimpses of the whole story in very short scope. And Romans 8 verses 18 and following is actually one of those places.

[3 : 53] Up until this point in Romans 8, it's as if we've been following Paul on a trail through a dense forest. We've been going really slowly through this dense forest this fall, looking at all the details.

And it's been beautiful in its own right. The trees have been towering above. The sunlight has been streaming through the canopy. But here in verse 18, the trail suddenly comes out of the thick undergrowth.

And we find ourselves standing atop a cliff's edge. And what bursts into view is a breathtaking sight. A deep valley stretches out below.

You're up so high now that you can see whole towns scattered into the distance. You can see smoke rising from chimneys. You can see the cars driving on the interstate. You can see for miles and miles into the horizon.

You can see mountains rising up in majesty. You can see the ocean in the distance. You can see the ocean stretching even further beyond, farther than your eye can see.

[4 : 53] Here we stand in Romans 8, in this moment, taking in the whole scope of redemption and breathtaking heights. But this majestic view in Romans 8, 18 and following is here actually for a very practical pastoral purpose.

Paul has just been describing in verses 14 through 17 how all those who believe in Jesus are made God's children. And if we are God's children, Paul says, then we are God's heirs.

Heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ. But if we are heirs with Christ, Paul says, then we will come into that inheritance in the same way as Jesus our King did.

In other words, the road to glory will be marked with suffering. Paul ends verse 17 by saying, provided we suffer with Christ in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Suffering and glory were inseparable for Jesus, weren't they? For the joy set before him, he endured the cross, Hebrews says. And it will be the same for us as followers.

[6 : 07] 1 Peter 5 says that it's only after we have suffered a little while that we will enter into eternal glory in Christ. And this suffering that Paul is talking about here is not just persecution for the name of Christ, although it certainly includes that.

It also takes within its scope the whole host of hardships and afflictions and diseases and broken relationships and heartbreaks that we will face in this life, in this age, in this fallen world.

Being a child of God does not exempt us from these things in this age, you see. And when that suffering comes, whether it's a chronic bad back from that injury so many years ago, or whether it's cancer that takes your life, whether it's a friendship that's strained or whether it's a marriage that's on the verge of meltdown, whether it's a season of unemployment or a natural disaster that steals everything earthly that you love, your home, your family, your community, when suffering comes, as verse 17 says, it will, what is it that will keep us from walking away?

What will keep us from thinking, God, if this is how you treat your children, no thanks. Paul has a very practical pastoral reason for leading us out of the woods to this high cliff's edge so we can take in the whole breathtaking view.

Look at verse 18 again. For I consider, Paul says. I consider.

[8 : 04] This isn't Paul's sort of private opinion. This isn't sort of his ephemeral emotional response to some fleeting reality. No, this is Paul using his mind and thinking deeply, reasoning deeply about what he knows to be true in light of who God is and the gospel.

As if to say we're not to be blown and tossed by sloppy thinking. No, Paul says, I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Suffering and glory may be inseparable for the Christian, but they are not comparable, Paul says.

Put them on a scale. That's a bit of what considering means. Weigh them up. Take the sufferings of this now time, this present age, and put them over here. And now take the glory that is to be revealed to us and put it on the other side.

And Paul says, watch the scales tip so quickly that those sufferings suddenly seem so light in comparison.

[9 : 24] Now, what's Paul not saying here? He's not saying that suffering isn't suffering. He's not saying that evil is not evil. He's not denying the harsh, awful reality of our existence in a fallen world.

He's not turning a blind eye to Alzheimer's or depression. He's not saying earthquakes and hurricanes don't matter or aren't really that bad. No, but he wants us to know.

Paul wants us to know how to face those things when they come. And he says, put it on the scale.

There's a glory that's going to be revealed. God is going to unfurl a beauty of such staggering dimensions in the coming age, a breathtaking majesty of such proportion that the real sufferings of this present time will not be worth comparison.

And this glory will not just be revealed to us as if we'll sort of see it from afar and that's it. No, the word there actually means it will be revealed unto us.

[10 : 36] We will be participants in the glory to come. We will be swept up along with it. What God has in store in his coming glory isn't going to be a sort of mere movie that we get to watch in comfy stadium seating with a cup holder there and it sort of reclines.

Have you been to those movie theaters? That's not what God has in store. It's not going to be like watching a movie. We know what's coming is going to be a drama for us to enact.

Each of us with a part in hand. Each of us with a role to play. God's glory will come and it will sweep us into it as his children. So what is it?

What is this vision, this practical pastoral vision of glory that Paul lays out for us so that when suffering comes on the path of discipleship, we won't give up? Well, it's a vision of glory that has two interlocking parts.

The first part is a vision of God's creation. The second part is a vision of God's children, of us Christians. And they're interwoven, they're interlocked in this passage.

[11 : 52] And we're actually going to spend two weeks in our morning service unpacking this interlocking vision. Today we're going to look at verses 19 through 22 and see what Paul has to say about God's creation, that first element.

And then next week Greg's going to pick up in verse 23 and we're going to consider what God has to say, what Paul has to say about us Christians, about us as God's children. So God's creation this week, God's children next week in this vision of glory to come.

So what does Paul want us to see about God's creation and the incomparable glory that's in store for us? Well, first, before Paul actually gets into that, he wants to teach us a little bit.

He wants us first to see that the present state of this world is not how it was originally intended to be. Let's get our thinking right, Paul says.

Look at verse 20. Verse 20 says, the creation was subjected to futility. Now it's easy to look around the world and see futility, isn't it?

[12 : 58] That same word futility is used in the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes, chapter 1. Everything under the sun, the writer of Ecclesiastes observes, it never seems to go anywhere. Empires are built, empires fall.

The wise man builds up an inheritance, but it's left to a fool. Pleasures come and pleasures go. Everything seems trapped in a cycle of decay and disrepair. And as soon as you think you've made your mark, the tides of history rise and wash it all away.

And those books you've labored long to write are found in the dusty corners of a used bookshop somewhere that will eventually go out of business thanks to Amazon. It's easy to look around and see futility, isn't it?

Frustration, even emptiness. But that's not how it began. Creation didn't begin this way. It's not how it's supposed to be.

You see, look carefully at what Paul says here. The creation was subjected to futility. Something happened along the way. And here Paul's alluding to the opening chapters of Genesis, where as a result of Adam's rebellion against God, God didn't just banish Adam and Eve from the garden, but God also cursed the ground.

[14 : 24] God subjected creation to futility. Now you have to see that God's intention for humanity, God's intention for us as his unique image bearers, he intended us to be stewards of creation.

This is why he made us and put us in the created order. He put us there to joyfully unlock and discover this created order's potential, to unwrap its latent potencies and its treasures, to unwrap them like a gift that we would offer back to God.

We were meant to sort of take our place in this created order and to tune it like an instrument so that it would sing the praises of its creator. But as a result of Adam's sin, and as a judgment on that sin, God subjected creation to futility.

No longer would it yield its treasure, now it would produce thorns and thistles. And Adam and his descendants would extract the good from it only by painful toil and sweat until death claimed them and they returned to the dust from which they had been taken.

What does all this mean? Friends, it means that the present futility of the created order from the worst of natural disasters to the weeds that choke out your measly little vegetable garden are a signpost.

[15 : 59] The futility of creation is a signpost declaring that our relationship with God has been broken because of sin and desperately needs to be repaired.

The futility of creation is like a giant hedge on our self-centered path. Because as fallen humans, we want to live life without God, right?

We want to be our own lords and our own saviors. We don't want anything to do with God. Thank you very much. We want to seek our joy and life and peace apart from God and apart from God's rule on our own two feet.

We want to run things our own way. But in God's severe mercy to us, He subjects His good creation to futility against its own will so that we rebellious humans will be constantly reminded that our satisfaction can't be found in created things, but only in our Creator.

So that we would be constantly reminded that we aren't in control and we can't be the master of our own destiny. And that if we keep trying, a much worse fate awaits us, an eternity without God.

[17 : 39] So friends, if you sometimes get the sense that this world isn't the way it's supposed to be, that all the evil and suffering and chaos isn't how it should be, then there is a sense in which you are utterly right.

But are you listening rightly to the signpost that creation was subjected to futility?

That's point number one, that the present state of the world is not the way it was originally supposed to be. But here's point number two, the present state of the world is not the way it will always be.

Look again at verse 20. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope. God subjected creation to futility as a judicial sentence on Adam's sin, but God did so in hope.

When God struck the ground, he did so with a plan, with a purpose, with a goal in mind. God subjected creation to futility in redemptive hope.

[18 : 59] What is the future? This hope that God has in store for creation. Look at verse 21, in hope that the creation will be set free. One day, Paul says, creation itself will be set free.

It'll be liberated. Its shackles will come off. Its chains will be broken. And what is it going to be set free from? The creation will be set free from its bondage to corruption.

That word corruption here means decay and decline and disintegration. Of course, yes, there is now still amazing beauty in the world.

There is now still life and birth and growth and joy, but none of these present graces escape the cycle of decay and disease and death now, do they?

Creation is enslaved to futility, to disintegration, but not forever. One day, it will be set free from the tyranny of decay.

[20 : 07] That's what it will be set free from. What will it be set free for? Verse 21 again, the creation will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

And it's here. It's right here in this very moment. This is the moment when we step out of the forest trail and onto the cliff's edge.

This is where we get the breathtaking view. This is what, as verse 19 says, creation is waiting for with eager longing.

Paul says the whole created order is standing on tiptoe, stretching its neck, craning forward. That's the image of eager longing in verse 19. Creation is straining out its neck to see with eager expectation.

What is it eagerly expecting? What is it yearning for? What is it waiting for? For the revealing of the sons of God.

[21 : 13] Or as verse 21 puts it, for the glory of the children of God. So friends, if you've come to put your trust in Christ, if you've put your faith in Him, and you are a daughter, you are a son of God, and this verse is about you.

In Christ, you have become one of God's children, and God's purpose, God's plan, God's supreme hope for creation is bound up with you.

When the children are revealed in glory, it will bring all creation with them. When Christ returns in this old age, finally gives way to the age to come, when the sun comes up and drives away the darkness forever, on that day, all of God's children will be seen as they truly are in Christ.

We will be raised imperishable, incorruptible, and we will take our place with Christ as heirs, as the regents of creation God originally made us to be.

And then, as the sons and daughters of God take their place, at long last, creation will be set free. And you just thought you were coming to church.

[22 : 45] This is how it was meant to be, friends. You see, Adam, Adam, as God's image bearer, was meant to lead creation into glory.

Adam was meant to be at the head of the train, leading the procession of creation into the never-ending joy of God. Creation from the very start had a direction, and Adam was the one.

Humanity were the ones who were supposed to take it there. But Adam failed. And we've all continued to fail after him.

Yet, where Adam failed, Christ has succeeded. That through his perfect life.

Do you think they were just magic tricks that Christ came, healing creation in his wake during his earthly ministry? In his life, he was showing us that he'd come to set creation free from its bondage to decay.

[23 : 59] But how would he ultimately do it? In death, he would destroy death. He would bear the curse of Adam, and he would bear the curse of creation, and he would go down and swallow it whole.

And three days later, he would rise. And a new creation would begin. And friends, through faith, by his Spirit, those who respond to the call of God that goes out with the proclamation of the gospel, those who respond to Christ in faith and put their trust in him, are made, his brothers and sisters, are made, co-heirs with him.

And we, along with Christ, will lead, once again, the procession of the created world into the never-ending joy of God. And it won't end.

That's what never-ending means. Because if God is an infinitely majestic God, then there must be infinite ways in which we, as his creatures, can enjoy it and explore it and display it.

Do you see the vision here? God isn't going to scrap this world, annihilate it, and start over. He's got a much deeper plan than that.

[25 : 43] He's going to liberate it. He's going to take this material world and it's going to be set free and transformed. And this is something that the New Testament says again and again and again.

This isn't just Paul being a weirdo. This is what the New Testament says again and again. Jesus himself spoke of the new birth of the world at his second coming. Peter talked about the restoration of all things.

Paul elsewhere will talk about the reconciliation of all things. And John will speak of the new heavens and the new earth where God dwells with his people. And we don't just see it in the New Testament, we see it in the Old Testament.

The Psalms speak of creation clapping their hands and rejoicing when God comes to judge. We read it earlier. Elizabeth read it for us. Did you get an echo of creation set free from its bondage to decay in that Psalm at the end?

Isaiah says that God will one day create a new heaven and a new earth and out of the desert will come streams of water and ferocious poisonous animals will end up laying down in peace.

[26 : 45] Death, disease, decay will be forever cast off. Isaiah says it's like a sheet that's been laid over us, like a shroud that's come down, a veil.

But he says one day it will be torn off and on the mountain of God will be a feast of rich food and wine for us to enjoy forevermore. God's material creation will be redeemed and glorified because God's children will be redeemed and glorified.

Now, if you're sitting there speculating how on earth that's going to happen, how these molecules are going to make those molecules, well, I think it's probably best to let God work out all the details of transforming this world into the world to come.

There's going to be continuity and discontinuity. Clearly, what God has in store is beyond our imaginations. Yet, what's in store? This glimpse we're given is meant to start engaging our hearts now.

It's meant to instill in us a sense of the incomparable glory to come so that all of our present suffering can be considered in the right perspective.

[28 : 04] And our third and last point is meant to do that very thing to help reframe our perspective on present suffering. If our first point, if Paul's sort of first point looked to the past when God subjected creation to futility and this next point, the second point sort of looked ahead to when creation will be liberated from its bondage to decay, Paul now brings us back to the present in verse 22.

He comes back to the here and now. in creation, he says, is groaning. And we hear it, don't we?

We feel it, groaning. But you see, this groaning isn't the meaningless groan of futility that it will never end.

And this groan isn't the groan of despair in the face of disease and decay. No, what does Paul say? This is the groan of a mother in labor.

The whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. Now, you can probably guess that I have not given birth, but I have been present for three.

[29 : 32] And I think it is a safe assumption to say that childbirth is a painful process. Excruciating and exhausting.

It takes the whole of you and it lays you down in pain. But in the end, it's exhilarating, is it not?

At the end of the day, the pain of childbirth is not worth comparing to the joy of holding a new child in your arms.

I have never seen someone move from excruciating pain to limitless joy in such a second as when my children were born.

And Paul says, friends, the world in which we live is not a random, directionless mass of atoms fluttering this way and that.

[30 : 47] It's the good creation of a good God who, yes, subjected it to futility, but did so in hope that one day it would be set free when Christ and all the children of God are revealed and God gives birth to a new world that fulfills the deepest longings and intentions that this one was always meant to fulfill.

I mean, goodness gracious friends, why do we as human beings still have an impulse to make art and music?

Why do we still have an impulse to wake up in the morning and go to our jobs? Why are any of us crazy enough to have children given the present state of the planet?

it? Why would you bring children into this world? Because you and all, you and I know that God subjected it to futility and hope and the suffering that we see now is not the final word.

They're the birth pains pointing ahead. They're excruciating. They're exhausting. But one day, they will give way to joy.

[32 : 17] But here's where the rubber hits the road, friends. If you're going to be a part of that renewed creation, and all of us are beckoned in, if you're going to be a part of that renewal of all things, then you yourself need to be renewed.

And that brings us to the heart of the gospel, that God wanting to create and recreate His people so that they might lead creation into glory, in love, sent His one and only Son into the world, who died in the place of sinners to take away the penalty of sin that we deserve, and who rose again on the third day to give us new life.

You see, how was it that God could subject creation to futility and hope? How would God save creation from the futility that He sentenced it to?

How would God rescue creation from Himself? Where did the hope spring from? God save Him?

It sprang from the eternal counsels of our triune God, because God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit had planned from eternity a work of redemption, that where sin abounded, grace would much more abound, and where death reigned, life would give way to final victory.

[33 : 52] from the moment God struck the ground, He already knew that He was going to strike His Son so that we could all be set free, so that everyone who comes and takes hold of Christ would have their guilt of sin released, their hearts made new, and they might be adopted into God's family and made heirs of this new creation hope that God has always had.

So friends, if you hear God's voice, don't harden your heart. Place your trust in the One who came in love for you.

To all who received Him, who believed in His name, He gave them the right to become the children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and co-heirs with Christ. And here is the good news for all of those who have trusted in Christ.

God's going to renew all of creation. This whole thing is going to be transformed, set free from decay, and we will enjoy it forever, and God will give us new bodies and minds and hearts to be able to enjoy it.

But the best thing of all is this, all of the ways in which creation was meant to display God's glory will be repaired. When creation's futility gives way to the liberty and the glory of the children of God, we will then taste and see that the Lord is good in ways that you and I right now can't imagine.

[35 : 22] Friends, if a sunset thrills your soul, imagine what that sunset will be like when creation is set free from its bondage to decay. If the massive redwoods of California speak of the majesty of God, if the stars and constellations and galaxies declare how holy and powerful God is, if the waves pounding against the shore echo God's faithfulness and greatness and steadfast love that just keep coming and coming and coming and don't stop.

Imagine what God will show us of Himself in the new heavens and the new earth when we can enjoy it with totally new bodies and selves.

then we'll see that the sufferings of this present age really aren't worth comparing to the glory that is to be revealed unto us.

So hold on, brothers and sisters. Hold on. One day an incomparable glory is coming and you will be at the front of the procession with Christ, your King.

Amen. Amen. Let's pray. Father, we need Your Spirit to come and testify to our hearts that we are indeed Your children.

[36 : 55] And we need Your Spirit to come and make this vision of glory real to us. Oh God, we've lived in the futility of this creation for so long that sometimes it just seems like a dream.

And yet, Holy Spirit, bring us back to the resurrection of Christ, to the conquest of death, to the beginning of the new creation in Him.

And Lord, help us to see and to trust Your Word that one day that will be true of all things and we in Christ with it at its head. And Lord, help us apart that, in the midst of suffering, to hold these things tightly, we pray.

In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. So I'll stand.

All creatures of our God and King Lift up your voice and with us sing Oh, praise Him,
hallelujah Thou burning sun with golden dew Thou silver moon is often lean Oh, praise
Him, oh, praise Him Hallelujah, hallelujah Now rushing with my heart so strong Ye clouds
that sail in heaven alone

[39 : 11] Oh, praise Him, hallelujah Thou rising moon in praise rejoin The lights of evening fire roar
Oh, praise Him, oh, praise Him Hallelujah, hallelujah Hallelujah, hallelujah And let all
things their Creator bless And worship Him in humbleness Oh, praise Him, oh, praise Him
Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son And praise the Spirit three in one

Oh, praise Him, oh, praise Him Hallelujah, hallelujah Hallelujah, hallelujah Hallelujah ; Oh,
praise Him, hallelujah!

Hallelujah! Hallelujah, hallelujah we praise praise our father Oh Well friends feel free to
stick around up here for fellowship.

There's coffee hour downstairs. Feel free to meet someone new and encourage one
another down there. If you would like to