

2. No Condemnation: Waiting Eagerly

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[0 : 01] Now before we look at Romans 8 verses 18 to 27, let's have a word of prayer. And Father we indeed pray that your gracious Spirit who inspired these words will now come to us and inspire our hearts to understand them.

That the Spirit will lead us to Christ himself and as we draw near to you that you will most graciously draw near to us. That you will open our hearts to your word and open your word to our hearts. In Jesus name. Amen.

Amen. I have a picture that I'm very fond of.

It's a picture called Quiet Forest and it has a deer standing in the early morning dawn in a rather beautiful wooded area. I like it for all kinds of reasons which I don't need to go into.

And I'd be extremely upset were it to be stolen. As far as I'm aware it's still there. It's not yet hanging in our new house. But as far as I'm aware it's still intact. At least I hope it is.

[1 : 21] But if it were stolen and the thief were apprehended and fined, that wouldn't satisfy me. Now don't imagine it's because I'm being vindictive. It's not, that's not the point.

The point is I want my picture back. Finding somebody who's stolen it won't do anything to get me my picture back. And what this passage is saying is this.

God wants his picture back. God wants his image back. You and I, all human beings are made in God's image. But that image has been stolen if you like.

It's been spoiled. And God wants his picture back. I said this morning that our bodies are not evil but they are fallen.

They need to be renewed. And one day they will be like Christ's glorious body. At the moment they are rather like a ruined building. Rather like say for example St. Andrew's Cathedral.

[2 : 22] Which even in its ruined state shows the magnificence it must have had in medieval times. And so it is that in human beings there is much that is good, much that is beautiful.

But all of it is spoiled by sin. And that's true of creation itself. God's picture has been stolen. His image has been stolen and spoiled in humans.

And his glory has been obscured in creation. Creation is beautiful. Look up at the night sky. Walk along by the seashore. Look at walk through a woodland path and so on.

But yet creation also has acid rain. Creation has dust bowls. Creation has tsunamis. God wants his picture back. And that's why we're going to look at this passage under the title Waiting Eagerly.

Taken from verse 19. Creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. Paul is developing the theme of verse 17.

[3 : 23] If we suffer with him, we shall be glorified with him. The theme of suffering and glory is not only true of individual humans. It's also true of creation.

And this really is a whole cosmic drama, if you like. Paul has told us earlier in chapter 5 that God created this wonderful creation.

And then onto the stage of creation trod two grim actors, sin and death. And they have dominated God's creation ever since.

Sin reigns. Death reigns. And when creation is renewed, sin and death are finally going to be removed. The curse is going to be removed. And we are going to be truly and eternally the children of God.

And creation is going to shine forth in glory and in splendor. That's the background then. I want to ask three questions of this chapter.

[4 : 29] First of all, what is it like now? That's the first thing Paul is speaking about. What is creation like now? Secondly, what will it be like then?

And finally, how do we know it's going to happen? Now, Paul is, if you like, playing with various themes throughout this chapter.

This is the kind of questions he was asking in the first part of the chapter. What we were as sinners. What we were in Adam, if you like. And what we are in Christ. And now he's asking that question on a much broader canvas.

The gospel is not just about individual salvation. It is, and that's wonderful. That's the very heart of it. But it's something so much more glorious, so much bigger.

The whole of creation is going to be renewed. Indeed, in a very real sense, you could say the whole of the Bible is an explanation of Genesis 1, verse 1.

[5 : 25] In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The moment it might look as if he didn't make a very good job of it. But that story is going to be completed. So first of all then, what is it like now?

For, he says, and that for is important because it's linked with the sufferings of verse 17. Provided we suffer with him. For, he says, I consider.

Now, consider means it's a firm conviction. This is not whistling in the wind. This is not saying everything's going to be all right kind of thing we say in a kind of panicky way.

When we know everything's not going to be all right. This is based on the facts of the gospel. It's based on the fact that Jesus died and rose again, has sent his spirit and is returning.

That's the reason why everything is going to be all right. It's not whistling in the wind. So what is it like now? Well, first of all, part of what it's like now is that suffering is inevitable.

[6 : 32] There is no way we can avoid it. Earlier on, Paul has said we are in Adam. We belong to the fallen race. That's part of what Christian life is like now.

And that's where some of our hymns and songs get it wrong. By promising us things that the gospel does not promise us. Both old hymns and new hymns.

He taught me how to watch and pray and live rejoicing every day. I don't live rejoicing every day. Some days I'm downright miserable.

And that hymn encourages us to believe that if we are true Christians, we will be rejoicing every day. Not that there isn't truth in that, because joy is not just a feeling of happiness.

It's very dangerous. Like the old hymn as well, When we walk with the Lord, Not a burden we bear, Not a sorrow we share, But a smile quickly drives it away.

[7 : 30] Once again, there is truth in that. But it's not quite as easy as that. We know that. There are some more contemporary choruses. My love just keeps on growing.

My joy is overflowing. My love doesn't just keep on growing. I've got to work jolly hard at it. A joy that knows no limit. A lightness in my spirit.

These things encourage us to believe that what is true of the church in heaven is also true always, and always, always, and continually for the church on earth.

Paul is saying, That's not the case. There is going to be suffering. Indeed, it's plural. The whole gamut. Illness, depression, violence, death.

All these belong to the fallen world. So, suffering is inevitable. We've got to realize, we've got to live in the real world. Now, I know that many of you have gone through Ecclesiastes, and that's what the message of Ecclesiastes, live in the real world.

[8 : 36] Don't pretend everything is going to be wonderful, because it's not. In this world, there are sufferings. So, that's the first thing. Suffering is inevitable. But secondly, suffering is only part of the story.

You see, if we, we mustn't go to the opposite extreme. We must live in the real world, and accept the fact that suffering is inevitable. But we mustn't go to the opposite extreme, and say that's the whole story.

Here it's placed in the larger context. Verse 18 again, I consider the sufferings of this present time, are not worth comparing, with the glory, that is to be revealed.

It's, in other words, there is a context, in which you must see suffering. Suffering is not, an end in itself. We mustn't speak of suffering, as if God sent it, because it's an end in itself.

And some, and of course, other voices speak that way. Some of you may be familiar, with the novels of Thomas Hardy. If you're currently feeling depressed, I don't recommend them as holiday reading, do you?

[9 : 46] You can see some of you know exactly what I mean. In Jude the Obscure, perhaps the most depressing book ever written, which I've read once in my life, and penciled at the end of it, never again.

Sue Folly writes, all is trouble, adversity, and suffering. And in Tess of the D'Aubervilles, the present of the immortals, we are told, has finished his sport with Tess.

In other words, the world's seen as a place, simply of suffering, of frustration, of depression, of what Ecclesiastes calls vanity, futility. And that's what Paul says, in verse 20, the creation was subjected to futility.

That's the word used in Ecclesiastes, the Greek version of the Hebrew word used in Ecclesiastes. So you see what Paul is saying, Paul is saying, live in the real world, realize that suffering is real, but live in the real world, and realize that glory is even more real.

Realize that what is going to be in the new creation is not some kind of fantasy, not some kind of wish fulfillment. That is far more real, far more lasting, far more impressive than all the futility.

[11 : 03] The victory is already won. Paul says, the glory that is to be revealed to us, the glory is already there. The city, whose builder and maker is God, is already there.

So what is it like now? What it's like now is that we live in a world where suffering is real, where hardship, depression, disappointment are part of daily living.

But yet, the glory that is to be revealed is not just the glory to come, it's the glory that's already there, and from time to time that breaks through in this, into our world.

Rather like if you switch on a radio channel and distantly you hear music coming from another channel. That's what this life is like. So what's it like now? But secondly, what's it going to be like then?

Actually, the next verse is 19 to 22. For the creation, verse 19, waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

[12 : 03] In other words, what's the connection between the glorifying of the children of God, the full salvation that we will realize in heaven, and the new creation.

And this is what Paul is going on to explain. Creation here is personified. Creation waits with eager longing. The picture is of someone standing on tiptoe, longingly waiting for something or someone. The true revelation of the glory of God. The psalm I read at the beginning of the bounty of the harvest. The psalm we sang, Psalm 98, with its wonderfully extravagant language about the trees of the field clapping their hands and so on.

This is a picture which is going to be realized in the future. So let's ask one or two questions about this then. Why is creation longing?

Why is it that when we look out on this glorious creation of God, we sense an expectancy, we sense a longing, we sense a frustration? The background is Genesis 3.

[13 : 12] In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve fall. They disobey God. They become sinful. And because of that, the rest, everyone else ever born into the world is born a sinner.

But more than that, the whole of creation is cursed. Adam and Eve were created to be stewards of creation. They were placed in the garden in Eden in order to protect it, to guard it, and indeed, ultimately, if you like, to Edenize the whole world.

That's what they were placed there for. You know that wonderful passage in John 20 when Mary Magdalene, in the dim light of the early morning on the resurrection morning, stands weeping outside the tomb where Jesus had been buried.

She sees a figure standing there in the dim light and she imagines that he's the gardener. And you know she was absolutely right. That is exactly who he was.

This was the last Adam, the gardener, returned to renew God's creation. And what he had done on the cross, what he had done by rising from the dead, guaranteed that the whole world, the whole universe, would become the theater of God's grace and God's glory.

[14 : 35] The creation was subject to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it. Now, who is him who subjected it?

That's one of the questions that the commentators talk about. Now, some argue that it's Adam himself. But I don't think that's true because Adam is part of the fallen creation.

He's not. He's not the one who subjected it. others argue it was Satan, the devil himself, who tempted Adam and Eve and caused them to fall and caused creation to fall along with them.

But I think the real truth is that this is God himself. He is the one who subjected creation to futility, subjected it to futility in order to drive people to Christ, to forgiveness, to recreation, if you like. back in chapter 1, Paul talks there about people worshipping the creation rather than the creator. And he says God gave them over the fact of judgment.

[15 : 43] Now, judgment means, when judgment is preached, that means God is calling us to change. God is calling us to turn. God is calling us to repent.

repent. And the pangs that creation feels, the pains here in verse 22, the groaning are not the pains of death, but of life.

Creation groaning in the pains of childbirth. Creation is going to be renewed. Creation is going to be reborn. So it is longing because until that happens, creation like humanity itself is going to be spoiled.

There is a tension. There is a curse, if you like, over the whole of creation. There is futility. That is why Christians are subject to futility as well.

That is why the book of Ecclesiastes is so important, not just for unbelievers, but for Christians. Because as Christians, we so often try to build our hopes in this world.

[16 : 47] We try to build our expectations in this world. and therefore, we find our lives to be futile. We find our lives to be empty. So why is creation longing? It is longing really for its new clothes, for its new dress, for its new righteousness.

And what is creation waiting for? Verse 21, creation itself will be set free from bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

in other words, when humanity, who are appointed by God to be his vice-regents on the earth, who are appointed to look after the world, when they are like Christ, then creation itself can be free. You see the wonderful, the wonder of this, it's such a big, it's such a huge idea. It's not just the redemption of individual souls, wonderful as that is, but it is a new creation in which humanity, those of humanity who have given their lives to Jesus Christ, who have been themselves redeemed for the curse, when they are fully like Christ, then creation can be fully redeemed as well to fulfill its eternal purposes.

That's why when you read the Old Testament prophets, those glowing prophecies of the desert blossoming like the rose, of the wolf lying down with the lamb, of streets with children playing in them, of all these wonderful pictures in the Old Testament prophets, they're pointing far beyond the return of God's people from exile, which is the original reference of many of them.

[18 : 26] They're pointing to this period still to come. We look for the new heaven and the new earth, the deeper country that C.S. Lewis talks about in Narnia, where heaven above is indeed soft or blue and earth beneath is sweeter green.

So, what will it be like then? It will be like Eden, but going far beyond Eden. There will be no serpent there. There will be no death and sin entering there.

What it is now, it's, there is glory, but there is frustration. Then, there will only be glory and the frustration will be gone. How do we know that it's going to happen?

Let me put that a different way. How do we know we are going to make it? Verses 23 to 27. Verse 23, And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit grown inwardly, as we await eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Can we be sure that that's going to happen? After all, the struggle and the frustration are as real, as I say, for Christians as for non-Christians. A dead body doesn't, on a mortuary slab doesn't look any different because that person's been a Christian.

[19 : 47] All the evidence around us doesn't suggest that this is going to happen. And Paul is saying now, we have a definite guarantee that this is going to happen. We have the first fruits of the Spirit.

He's already mentioned that in the early part of the chapter, but now he's particularly applying this to our prayer life. He's particularly talking about how the Spirit makes this real to us.

I think we've got to remember one or two things. First of all, we still only have the first fruits.

However wonderful our experience may be, however exciting, however deep, however impressive, it is only the first fruits.

Feel like we're still in the entrance hall. There is a fuller gift still to come. Paul has already said we are adopted. We've been adopted into the family of God. But now you see how he defines adoption in verse 23.

We eagerly await for the adoption of sons, the redemption of our bodies, which means the resurrection of our bodies and making us like Christ.

[20 : 58] Christ. We're very conscious. We're still tied to the old age of sin and death. Christians still sin. Christians still die.

We know that. But prayer is mentioned here, I believe, because prayer is the way in which the Spirit helps us to anticipate the life of the world to come.

See, prayer is on the one hand evidence of our weakness, isn't it? People who have no sense of their own weakness and helplessness don't pray. They don't look up because they think everything they need is in themselves.

So prayer is an evidence of our weakness, an evidence that we are caught up in this futility of the rest of creation. But also, it is an evidence that God's power, the anticipations of the world have come, come right down into our world.

verse 24, in this hope we were saved. Now, hope that is seen is not hope. But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

[22 : 06] So the Spirit bears the burden with us. That is the point it seems to me. Verse 26, likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness.

We all know how difficult it is to pray. We all know that when we decide to pray, we remember a thousand things that we need to do. We remember a phone call we ought to make.

We remember an errand we ought to run. Let's read another chapter of this book or let's wait until I feel fresher. Of course, we never feel fresher because the devil doesn't want us to pray.

And therefore, we need the Spirit. Even in prayer, in other words, we need grace. We must never imagine that prayer is a meritorious work that gains us credit with God.

Prayer is a sign of our weakness and a sign of God's power working in our weakness. And there are many times when we don't know what to say. Verse 26, we do not know what to pray for as we ought.

[23 : 09] But the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. Those inarticulate longings, longings, those half-formed thoughts and wishes.

We don't know what to pray. And the Spirit Himself prays. Because after all, in the court of heaven, when we join, if you like, our feeble Twitter with the angels and archangels and all the court of heaven, who is it who presents these prayers?

Who is it that is praying in us? It's the Spirit Himself. When we can't find words, we can't still pray because it is the Spirit who is both making us pray in the first place and presenting those prayers. And the other thing is the Spirit's intercession is effective. Verse 27, 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.

If you like, the Spirit filters out all that is of self, all that belongs to the world of Adam and futility and presents to God those prayers that are in accordance with God's will.

[24 : 23] Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians that the Spirit searches everything, even the deep things of God. So as we pray and as we pray in dependence on the Spirit, we need not be afraid to pray exactly what is in our hearts because it is the Spirit who is interceding for us.

And prayer is one of the ways in which God carries out His will. You don't have to read much of church history or for that matter much of Scripture to discover that when God means to do a work in His people's lives, He sets them to pray because praying is one of the first, one of the most effective signs that the Spirit is at work.

Now we're not always going to feel this way. We're not always going to feel good about it, but it is a reality. There are moments, golden moments, when God in His grace will reveal to us something of that reality and something of the actual presence of the Spirit.

Even when He doesn't, we must remember it is the Spirit Himself. It's as if the Spirit is saying, Father, you've placed me in this child of yours to bring her, to bring him to glory.

There are many, many difficulties ahead, many trials, many problems, but we're going to make it. This child of yours can never be lost.

[25 : 57] This child of yours can never fail to make it right into your presence. And so Paul is saying, because all that is true, because our path to glory cannot be thwarted, live now in the light of then.

Let's pray. As we pray, I want to use some of the words from the hymn we're going to sing in a moment.

For your gift of God the Spirit, power to make our lives anew. Pledge of life and hope of glory. Savior, we would worship you.

Crowning gift of resurrection sent from your ascended throne. Fullness of the very Godhead come to make your life our own. Father, we praise you for your gracious and boundless gift of God the Holy Spirit sent by the ascended Lord.

Amen. Challenged God. Strick, Godhead and