

The Sufferings of this Present World

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[0 : 00] But we're going to turn now to our Bible reading this morning, which is not the reading on the sheets, but different. We're going to be in Romans chapter 8, Romans chapter 8 and verse 18, particularly verses 18 to 25.

But we'll read from verses 18 to 30 to get the flow of Paul's words here. So page 944 in the Church Bible is Romans chapter 8 at verse 18.

4 says Paul, We hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain 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.

We groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for the adoption of sons, for the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved.

[1 : 37] Now 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, with endurance.

Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings.

And he who searches heart knows what is in the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good.

For those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

And those whom he predestined, he also called. And those whom he called, he also justified. And those whom he justified, he also glorified.

[2 : 47] Amen. May God bless to us this, his word. Let's bow our heads together for a moment of prayer. Dear God, our Father, your words are our very life.

And we pray that as we read them and think about them this morning, they will bring fresh life, fresh understanding, fresh joy, fresh ability to serve and to love you into our hearts and lives.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, friends, let's turn together to Romans chapter 8 and verse 18. And you'll find this on page 944.

Now, my title for this morning is a phrase that I've lifted straight out of verse 18. The sufferings of this present time. And I'd like to speak about the way in which the Apostle Paul teaches the church at Rome and the church today, the church of 2,000 years later, how to look at suffering.

How, if you like, to develop a God-given perspective on it. Now, this is a subject which is, I guess, of immediate and pressing concern to all of us at two levels.

[4 : 07] First, there's the question of how we handle suffering ourselves in our own lives, our personal suffering. Because all of us at different times in life have to face very difficult things.

It may be illnesses, bereavements, trouble in the family, financial hardship, loss of employment, and many other things, including, of course, times of persecution for our faith.

But secondly, there's the question of how we are to look at and to try to understand the sufferings of the world around us. We know that every week in the news, and this week has been particularly so, there is a catalogue of terrible suffering.

Of course, the news presents this suffering to us. The news is mostly about suffering. We would hardly expect the BBC to focus on the good and pleasant and lovely and happy things of life.

We're not going to switch on the radio in the morning and hear of the times when the sun is shining sweetly, and the nation is behaving perfectly, and everybody is treating everybody else with

supreme courtesy, and the hens are laying well.

[5 : 12] The fact is that as we listen to the news, 95% of the news is bad news, and it's news about suffering. And we listen to it with grief and pain.

So we need help with understanding our own sufferings, and we need help with understanding the sufferings of the wider world. Now, throughout the eighth chapter of Romans, Paul is saying to his readers, mind the gap.

There is a gap between the way that we experience life on the one hand and the objective realities of the gospel on the other hand. Let me give one or two examples from the chapter.

Verse 1. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Now that, Paul is saying, is the objective reality of the gospel.

Christians have been removed decisively, categorically, from the sphere of God's condemnation. That is fact and reality. Christ has taken on the cross the condemnation that we deserved, so we are justified in God's sight.

[6 : 16] But it doesn't always feel like that to us. But we sometimes feel condemned because of our sinful frailties. But Paul is saying to us, you are not condemned.

That's the reality. Or look at verse 11. If the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

Now that's the objective reality of the gospel. Our mortal bodies, if we're Christians, will be raised immortal, following the pattern of Jesus himself. But it doesn't feel like that, does it?

Especially if you're over 50. Our experience of getting older, the aging process, our experience is that everything is falling apart. But Paul is saying, if you're a Christian, you are going to be raised.

Believe it, brother or sister. That is the truth. Or look on to verse 35. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

[7 : 22] Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

Christians who are having to endure extreme suffering of that kind, that verse 35 kind, are bound to feel very low at times and to feel cut off from Christ.

But the objective reality, Paul is saying, in the next few verses, is that nothing whatever in the whole of creation will be able to separate us from the love of God expressed in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Mind the gap. Our experience of life will quite often be rather dark and rather bleak. But there is a gap between our perception of life and the things that God is actually doing for us and has done for us.

Now, in our paragraph for this morning, verses 18 to 25, there's a similar gap between the way in which we naturally view suffering and the objective truth about it as seen from God's point of view. So if we can grasp the objective truth about suffering, it will greatly help us to endure our own times of trial and better understand the turmoil of the world around us.

[8 : 38] Now, we'll get into the passage in just a moment, but let me begin with a true story. I think the year was 1981, and I was working in Manchester at the time as a junior minister.

And our church had arranged to have a weekend of teaching and preaching to be given to us by a man called Sir Norman Anderson. Some of you may remember the name of Norman Anderson. He was then aged about 70. He was well known as the author of a number of fine Christian books, and he'd been a leading Anglican layman for many years. During his working life, he had been, and this may sound a surprise to you, he'd been the professor of Islamic law at London University.

So he was an academic, he was an evangelical Christian, he was an expert student of Islam, and he was a very able speaker. And we had a very good weekend with him at our church.

And on the Saturday afternoon at about 4 o'clock, there was a pause. And because I was the junior minister, I'd been delegated to give him an afternoon cup of tea. A challenging task for a man like me with limited culinary gifts.

[9 : 43] Anyway, we sat together in my front room, and over the jammy dodgers and the teacups, remember, I was young, and this was a senior and rather august figure. So I was trying to make polite conversation with him in the best way that I could.

And not knowing quite what to say, I asked him a stock question. So Norman, do you and your wife have a family? There was a pause.

And then he said to me slowly and very gently, my wife and I had three grown-up children, but they've all died. I said nothing.

What could I say? And he went on to tell me about his three children, I think they were two girls and a boy, and how all of them, for different reasons, had died in their 20s and 30s.

Now, Sir Norman and his wife, of course, would have been well into middle age when these three tragedies occurred. How had they coped? Well, clearly, they had not taken offense at God.

[10:42] Still less had they cursed him and turned their backs on him. And here was the father, now quite elderly, traveling the country week by week, teaching the scriptures with enthusiasm and joy.

Clearly, there was a strength and a structure to his understanding of how God and human suffering are related. Now, it's something of that strength and structure that the Apostle Paul teaches us here in Romans chapter 8.

Let me point out four things by way of introducing verses 18 to 25. First, you can't separate suffering and glory.

Now, that was hinted at in verse 17. 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.

So the implication there is that if Christians don't suffer now, we shan't enjoy glory later. Christ suffered before going to glory, and that is the pattern, the pattern that will be repeated in every generation of Christ's followers.

[11:49] The suffering and the glory somehow can't be separated. Secondly, suffering characterizes this age. Glory characterizes the age to come.

Present suffering, future glory. The sufferings that Christians endure in this world arise partly from persecution, Christians being harassed by those who oppose the gospel, but they also partly arise simply from our total human frailty and condition.

We are physically and morally frail people. But by contrast, the future glory is the splendor and perfection of God himself, eternal and incorruptible, which will one day be fully enjoyed by Christians.

Then thirdly, Paul is making the point that the suffering and the glory cannot be compared. And this is what verse 18 is saying.

Let me read that verse again. I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. It's almost as though Paul is having a conversation with somebody who is taking an opposite point of view.

[13:03] And this other person says to him, Now, Paul, it's like this, isn't it? You have a hundred kilos weight of suffering in this world. But, of course, the scales balance up in the end, because you're going to get a hundred kilos weight of glory in the world to come.

But Paul says, no, it's not like that at all. If you have a hundred kilos weight of suffering in this world, you're going to get a hundred thousand kilos weight of glory in the world to come. You simply cannot compare the two.

The one is so much greater than the other. And then fourth, the sufferings and the glory concern both God's creation and God's children.

Now, these are the twin themes in these verses, held closely together, but still distinct. If you run your eye over the verses, you'll see that verses 20, 21, and 22 concern the creation, its present sufferings, and its future glory.

Whereas the next three verses, 23, 4, and 5, concern God's children, by which, of course, Paul means Christian people. And those verses describe the present sufferings and the future glory of Christians.

[14:12] And if you think about it, those twin themes, the creation and the children of God, could be described as the old creation and the new creation.

So the apostle is teaching us that both the old and the new creation are involved in present suffering and future glory. Now, I want us to look at Paul's material under two simple divisions. I've got two main headings. First of all, the sufferings and the glory of the creation. And second, the sufferings and the glory of God's children. So first, the sufferings and glory of the creation. Sufferings. Sufferings first. Now, Paul describes the sufferings of the creation in a series of somber and almost depressing phrases.

Look with me at them. Verse 20. The creation was subjected to futility. And verse 21. The creation suffers bondage to decay.

[15:13] And then verse 22. It is groaning as in the pains of childbirth. Now, when Paul speaks of the creation on the one hand and the children of God on the other hand, he's not drawing a distinction between plants and animals and rocks and planets on the one hand and human beings on the other.

No. The term the creation includes mankind in its natural state of rebellion against God. So Paul's distinction is between plants and animals and rocks and planets and unregenerate people on the one hand and those who have become Christians, in other words, the children of God, on the other hand.

So what does Paul mean by these somber descriptions of the creation? Verse 20. It was subjected to futility.

Or the word might be translated to frustration. Now, the reference here can only be to the action of God himself when he subjected it, when he sentenced Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

To put it very simply, Adam and Eve's rebellion was so serious that the whole environment was caught up in its consequences. This is why God says to Adam in Genesis chapter 3, Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree of which I commanded you, you must not eat of it.

[16:39] Cursed is the ground because of you. Not just cursed to you. Cursed is the ground because of you. Through painful toil, you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you.

By the sweat of your brow, you will eat your food. Now, that was the moment, surely, when God subjected the creation to futility or frustration. Before that awful moment, we're to understand that the cultivation of the earth was simply lovely for Adam.

Sweat-free, toil-free, thistle-free, free of aging and decaying and dying. The apples and plums and pears simply dropped off the trees into his mouth. But from Genesis chapter 3 onwards, the creation is marked by futility or frustration.

So much so that those who lack the cosmic perspective of Romans chapter 8 will look at the world and cry out, Vanity of vanities. All is vanity.

The slogan of the book of Ecclesiastes. We didn't have to wait for 20th century philosophers and playwrights like Samuel Beckett to point out the emptiness of human life in the old creation.

[17:49] It's all there in the Old Testament. Meaningless nihilism. It's there in the book of Ecclesiastes. And it all stems from that moment of God's curse in Genesis chapter 3.

Then we have the equally somber phrase, bondage to decay, in verse 21. That word decay suggests that everything is running down.

Rather like, just go back a month or two to the autumn, October or November. Do you ever go into a spare bedroom at the back of the house where a blue-bottle fly has been living for a month or two and it's running out of steam?

Do you know this sort of thing? About November, the heating's on and this fly's going... And it runs out of gas, doesn't it? Literally that.

The word bondage, it suggests enslavement to an unending cycle of decay. Both people and animals and plants grow and initially they're lovely.

[18:49] They grow strong, they're mature, but then they lose their strength and then they decay and decline and finally decompose. Now things still work in the creation because everything has been beautifully made and finely tuned.

And much in the creation is very beautiful. But in the present age, it's all in bondage to decay. Isn't this why there's a poignant sadness about the cycle of the year?

The spring comes and it's so lovely, isn't it? In the early summer, everything is beautiful from March to June. But then the days begin to grow shorter again and autumn comes and the cycle of decay is re-emphasized year after year.

And then in verse 22, Paul tells us that the whole creation, every atom of it, has been groaning. That's a pain-laden word.

Groaning as in childbirth pains. Childbirth. I was going to say hands up if you're a man. No need to put it. I can see who's what.

[19:51] Men, of course. We men, don't we suffer? We suffer from backache, bellyache, headache, earache, armache, eyeache, noseache. We suffer from everything, don't we? Man flu.

Come across that. But women who have had children, they know a different level of pain altogether. And that's the pain that Paul speaks of here to describe the writhings and the convulsions of the creation.

Childbirth pain can be unbearable. That's what a woman says. I can't bear this. I can't go on with it. And yet it has to be born. That's the suffering of the creation.

The creation suffers the unbearable pain that has to be born. The present sufferings of this creation. When we look thoughtfully at the pain which the world around us is enduring, the famines and the floods and the earthquakes, the disease, the poverty, the wars, the horrible things, all the human misery produced by these things, we have to trace it back as verse 20 puts it.

And this is something of a shock. We have to trace it back to the will of God. Now, it's a hard truth, this. Look again at verse 20.

[21 : 04] The creation was subjected to futility. Not willingly. It didn't put up its hand and say, please do this to us, Lord. No, not willingly. But because of him, that is God, who subjected it.

We're not going to come to terms with the suffering of creation until we accept not merely that God allows it, but that he wills it. This is the outworking of his righteous judgment against the rebellion of man.

But this is not the end of the story. The message of the Bible is wonderful good news once we see the situation in its cosmic setting as Paul unfolds it here.

So this leads us, secondly, to the future glory of God's creation. Now, you probably have noticed this morning in the text, even as I've been dwelling on these somber phrases of Paul, that these are not dead-end somber phrases.

Far from it. Each one is set in a context of hope and promise. So look at verse 20. The creation is subjected to futility by God, but for what purpose?

[22 : 14] Look at the end of the verse. In hope. Then look at verse 21. It's a bondage to decay in the present, but what of the future?

It is to be liberated from that bondage and brought into a glorious freedom, which is the freedom of the glory of the children of God. And then think again of verse 22.

Is labor pain a dead-end pain with no prospect of future relief? Of course not. The pain ends abruptly the moment the baby is born, and then something new and wonderful begins as you take the baby in your arms.

So the creation, which in the present is full of such suffering, is promised a glorious future where suffering will be replaced by liberty, freedom, and glory.

And let's notice the aspect of this that Paul particularly emphasizes. And that is the link between creation's glorious future and the glorious future of Christians, God's children.

[23 : 16] Just as back in Genesis chapter 3, the creation went down with the downfall of man. So here in Romans 8, the creation's ultimate renewal is part and parcel of the renewal of God's children.

So in verse 19, the creation is eagerly waiting, not for the renewal of the ozone layer, not for the replanting of the tropical rainforests, but for the Son of God, the sons of God, that is Christian people, to be finally revealed, which means identified in their glorious likeness to Jesus Christ. And in verse 21, the glorious freedom into which the liberated creation is to be brought is the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

The renewal of the creation is part and parcel of the restoration of God's children. Now, of course, this is so different from so much contemporary thinking about the creation.

Modern secular thinking about green issues, if you like, or about the creation, has more than a touch of desperation about it. We must reverse climate change.

[24 : 27] We must reduce the pollution of land, air, and sea. We must save the orang-utang and the tiger. Now, that kind of desperation stems from the absence of Paul's cosmic view.

Paul knows, because God has taught him, that the creation will ultimately be renewed in a different and far better form. If God can raise the dead, then a small matter like the recreation of the dodo or the orang-utang won't cause him any difficulties, surely.

I've always loved the world. I love tigers. I'm so interested in tigers that I even sometimes buy books about them and read them. And I'd be very sad if the tiger were to become extinct.

But if, we learn this from Isaiah, if in the Messiah's kingdom the lion is going to lie down with the lamb, I don't think I need worry about his stripy cousin. Modern secular thinking entirely lacks Paul's

cosmic understanding of the future renewal of the creation.

That's why it gets desperate. It thinks this world is the only world there is, so we've got to preserve it at all costs. If the tigers disappear, there'll be no more tigers.

[25 : 42] But Paul knows better. Now, of course, there are aspects of modern green or ecological thinking which sit very happily with Scripture. We certainly do have a responsibility to be good stewards of the earth.

And the Bible itself teaches us that responsibility. Adam is placed in the garden to till it and keep it. So, of course, it's good for us to do things like recycling and to cut our emissions of CO2 and so on. You'll see me almost every day walking across our yard to the blue dustbin, which is the recycling dustbin and putting paper and glass and all the rest of it into that bin. But the difference between secular green thinking and the Bible's teaching is that secular thought has no place for God and no place for a renewed creation.

A renewed creation is gloriously different from a recycled creation. And when Christians come to understand that God will dramatically renew everything in the end, it removes a great wedge of painful worry from our hearts.

We needn't worry about the creation when we remember who has undertaken to renew it finally. So, as far as the creation is concerned, the frustration will be replaced by hope, the bondage by liberation, and the pains of childbirth by the joy of something newborn.

[27 : 05] Present suffering will give way in the end to future glory. We're now to our second main heading, and that is the sufferings and glory of the children of God, that is, Christian people.

Let's notice first the sufferings of Christians. Verse 23. 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.

Now, we know that Paul is writing here about Christians and not about the human race in general, because he speaks of those who have the first fruits of the Spirit. He's already told us, back in verse 9 in this chapter, that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ do not belong to Christ.

So, those who have him belong to him. And here in verse 23, he uses this striking expression, those who have the first fruits of the Spirit.

He's implying that Christians have the Spirit of God, but what we have is only a foretaste of the full blessings of the world to come. In Ephesians chapter 1, Paul speaks similarly of Christians receiving the Holy Spirit as a deposit or a down payment, which acts as a guarantee from God of all the future blessings to be received in the world to come.

[28 : 29] Now, look with me at verse 23, and you'll see that Christians already have something, but at the same time, Christians are waiting for something which we don't yet have.

So, we have already received the first fruits of the Spirit, but we have not yet received the final redemption of our bodies, which will confirm our adoption as God's children.

We have something, but we're still waiting for something. And what characterizes our time of waiting? There it is in the middle of the verse, we groan inwardly.

Now, it's a great relief for me to hear Paul saying that, and it's a relief on two counts. First, because we live in a secular therapeutic culture today, which promises us freedom from stress and illness, as long as we take all the necessary cures.

You can pass shops within half a mile of this very spot, which advertise about a dozen different therapies, can't you? Aromatherapy, reflexology, counseling, so on and so forth.

[29 : 39] Now, the message of this whole therapy movement is, there's no need for human beings to groan. Take what we have to offer, and pay us handsomely for it, and you will enter a stress-free environment.

Now, friends, by all means, let's do little things. Let's take a hot bath enlivened by a sachet of lavender. Let's enjoy counseling, as long as it's counseling that comes from the Bible.

But let's not be deceived by the enticements of the therapeutic culture. If these therapies substantially worked, our culture's stress levels would be plummeting.

But we know they're going the other way. Groaning, says Paul, is the reality. So let's understand that and live with it. Now, secondly, this is a relief, because there are some churches and some Christians who give the impression that once you have become a Christian, groaning is a thing of the past.

Now, I'm sure you've come across sincere Christians who have said something like this, that Christians ought not to be ill, ought not to suffer depression, need not endure painful circumstances. [30 : 46] But if that's the case, what happens when your beloved Christian friend develops a horrible illness and dies? You've prayed for your friend, faithfully and sincerely.

Your church has assured you that if you pray faithfully, God is going to heal your sick friend. But now your friend has died. So you'll have to conclude either that God has let you down or that your own faith has been insufficiently strong to bring the desired healing.

And for either of these reasons, you may take offense at God and turn your back on him, because your church hasn't equipped you to deal with the reality of groaning. Now, I'm not saying that God will never heal our seriously ill friends in response to our prayers.

Sometimes he does wonderfully. But usually, terminal illness is terminal. And we know that from experience. Paul is teaching that groaning and suffering is normal for Christians.

We are not yet in heaven, he is saying. We wait eagerly, as he puts it in verse 23. But we have to wait with patience and endurance, as he puts it in verse 25.

[31 : 57] It's the reality of the world to come that makes us eager. And it's the reality of suffering in this world that requires us to be patient. We wait eagerly, but we wait patiently.

Now, secondly, the future glory of God's children. There it is in the second half of verse 23. We're waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Now, with both of these phrases, the adoption and the redemption, we must bear in mind that it is partly done already by the grace of God, and yet the fullness of it lies ahead in the world to come.

So with our adoption as sons, verse 15 tells us that we have, look back to 15, tells us we've already received the spirit of adoption as sons, already.

And verse 16 tells us that the Holy Spirit assures Christians that we are already God's children. Yet there's a fullness and a richness to this relationship that we cannot know and experience this side of heaven.

[33 : 07] We wait eagerly for the complete enjoyment of that father-to-child relationship. And it's the same with the redemption of our bodies. We have already been redeemed because Christ has already paid on the cross the purchase price for our freedom and forgiveness.

We are his now and we're his forever. But our bodies are not yet redeemed. If your body was redeemed now, you would never need to take another pill.

You would never need to buy a bigger pair of trousers. You would never need to have an artificial hip. But I guess we're all going to need these things, most of them, sooner or later. Our bodies are decaying and unredeemed now.

But the New Testament promises us that the bodies of believers will ultimately be changed by Christ to be like his glorious body. And our minds, as well as our bodies, will, of course, be totally renewed.

Well, let me in just a final couple of minutes draw together some of these threads to help us to see the strength and the structure of Paul's understanding of suffering in relation to God.

[34 : 18] There are three things that we can be sure about. First, we can be sure that suffering will come our way, that it's part of our human lot, if it hasn't yet come our way.

Christians, like anybody else, will experience traumatic bereavements, horrible illnesses, and very difficult episodes of many kinds. Paul is teaching us that this is an inevitable ingredient of living this side of heaven.

The world to come, the new creation, that's the realm that has no place for mourning, or pain, or tears, or death. But in this world, alongside the great blessings that God gives us, we will suffer, and that suffering can be traced back to the judgment that God placed on the world, the righteous judgment, following Adam's rebellion.

We will suffer. The second thing we can be sure about is that God did not place this judgment upon the world out of vindictiveness or nastiness, or because he takes pleasure in human pain.

It was his will to do this, as verse 20 puts it, but it had a purpose, so that the creation should look forward to a far better ultimate future.

[35 : 33] There's a gospel purpose, therefore, in this suffering. Now think of it, if everybody's life was perfect and pain-free in this world, it's hard to imagine, but just try and imagine that.

If everyone's life was without any pain, nobody would ask any serious questions about their existence. If our life were caviar and strawberries and champagne every day, I guess the most

pressing question we would ask would be, can I have another helping, please?

But when pain and suffering comes to us, we begin to ask if there might be a God who has something to say to us. As C.S. Lewis put it, suffering is God's megaphone to a careless world. So when our non-Christian friends suffer, let's love them and support them and also pray that their sufferings will turn them to Christ, as perhaps our sufferings have turned us to him in the past. Then the third thing we can be sure about is that if our satisfactions and joys are in God and the gospel, we shall be satisfied indeed.

[36 : 43] But if our satisfactions and joys are primarily in the things of this world, in God's gifts, rather than in God himself, we will come unstuck.

Let me put it like this. If our happiness and joy depends upon our having good health or a long and happy marriage or on the blossoming of family life or on the blossoming of business concerns and money plans and employment goals and holidays and hobbies, we may well become bitter with God.

Because these things will end. The best of marriages are cut short by death. Families can be places of strife and trauma. Financial exploits can go spectacularly wrong.

Employment goals can fizzle out if your health goes under. If our happiness depends on such things, we will be disappointed in the end. But if our happiness and our satisfaction depends upon God and the gospel, it means that we might be lying on our deathbed at the age of 35 with neither spouse nor children nor money and yet blissfully happy because of what we know is waiting for us. Sir Norman Anderson, the man I spoke about at the beginning, he knew about these things and that's why he was able to be a joyful, purposeful Christian after losing all three of his children.

[38 : 06] So Romans 8 doesn't promise us an easy ride, quite the contrary, but it gives us strength and structure to understand the pain of our world and of our own lives.

This world is the place of suffering, but for those who believe the gospel, God promises us the glorious freedom of the children of God in the world to come.

Let's bow our heads and we'll pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Dear God, our Father, we thank you so much for these words of the Apostle Paul and even as we read them, we think of the way in which he suffered to a degree unknown to any of us.

We think of the lashings and beatings and imprisonments, sometimes for years on end, the hostility and hatred and the trials and finally, as far as we know, death by executioner's sword.

And we think of this great joy that Paul passes on to us and his understanding of the place of suffering and tribulation in this world.

[39 : 19] Please, therefore, dear Father, strengthen our hearts, we pray, so that like the Apostle before us and like the Lord Jesus too, we might run our course with joy and enthusiasm, enduring whatever comes to us, but being filled with the sure and certain knowledge that in trusting in Christ, the world to come will be nothing but glory, joy, peace and bliss as we see you face to face and look at you and share the life of the world to come.

And we ask it all in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.