

The Long and Winding Road, That Leads to His Door

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[0 : 00] Well, if you'd take up your Bible, we're going to read together in our Bible reading for this evening, which you'll find in the New Testament in Paul's letter to the Romans and at chapter 8.

If you have one of the red Bibles, the church Bibles here, that's page 944. And Stephen Balligan is going to preach us from this passage, the second half of this great chapter.

And he's focusing on verse 17 to the end. That sort of starts in the beginning of a, in the middle of a sentence. So let me read from verse 16.

Paul says to us that the Spirit, that's the Holy Spirit himself, the Spirit of Jesus Christ, 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.

[1 : 14] For I consider that the sufferings of the present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us or in us. 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 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 adoption as sons. For the redemption of our bodies.

For in this hope we were saved. That hope that is seen is not hope for who hopes for what he sees. But if we hope for what we do not see.

[2 : 24] We wait for it with patience. Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we don't know what to pray for as we ought. But the Spirit himself intercedes.

With groanings. 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.

And we know. That is we know God's will. 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 from 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. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us.

[3 : 32] Who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son. But gave him up for us all. How will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It's God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died.

More than that. Who was raised. Who is at the right hand of God. Who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us? From the love of Christ.

Shall tribulation or distress. Stress. Or persecution. Or famine. Or nakedness. Or danger. Or sword. As it's written. For your sake. We are being killed all the day long.

We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. No. In all these things. We are more than conquerors.

[4 : 30] Through him who loved us. For I am sure. That neither death. Nor life. Nor angels. Nor rulers. Nor things present. Nor things to come. Nor powers.

Nor height. Nor depth. Nor anything else. In all creation. Will be able to separate us. From the love of God. In Christ Jesus.

Our Lord. Amen. And what a great word of God that is for us. Good evening everyone.

As we turn to our Bibles. Can you please keep your Bibles open at Romans 8. Which is on page 944. If you've got one of the Bibles here. And that would be very helpful as we go through this passage together.

I have had the sheer delight of being born and raised in Glasgow.

[5 : 33] The people of Glasgow are a unique and charming bunch. An acquired taste to some. But they are generally the best people around. There's a comedian called Kevin Bridges.

And he is about as Glaswegian as you can get. Some of his jokes about Glasgow secondary schools are painfully realistic for me. He's just finished touring and I caught some of it on TV. And the guy's done 19 shows at the Glasgow Hydro alone. So he clearly speaks for a lot of Glaswegians. Let me read to you his opening joke.

With a few colourful words edited out. It's good to see people coming for a laugh. It's important in this tense and uncertain world we live in. The world is scary.

It has gone down the pan. I've got PTSD from just watching the news. Earthquakes. Tsunamis. Donald Trump. Brexit. Kim Jong-un. Vladimir Putin.

[6 : 32] ISIS. Global warming. A refugee crisis. Sexual harassment. I think if you believe in God. You've got to acknowledge that the guy is in over his head.

It's getting a bit much for God. God has lost the dressing room. And the crowd loved it. I cringed when I heard that at first.

Maybe you did too. But before we rush to judge him. If we are talking about God as Kevin Bridges imagines him. Then that's actually a fair assessment of what's going on in the world.

You see Kevin's looking around at the world as he sees it. And it's uncertain. It's scary. It's tense. But that's all he's seeing.

And that's the problem. It all looks hopeless. Thankfully, we don't believe in the God of Kevin Bridges. We believe in the God of the Bible.

[7 : 33] And as we dig into Romans this evening. We're not just going to keep our eyes fixed on what we see around us. But are instead going to set our eyes on what the Lord wants us to. Not the present suffering we endure now.

But beyond that. To the future glory he has in store for us. Paul wrote this letter to the church in Rome. Who in particular needed to look beyond the world in front of their eyes.

To the future glory that the Lord had in store for them. They were living in the real world. So we're struggling with the same brokenness that we do.

But on top of that. They lived in Rome. A city that wasn't exactly welcoming to Christians. For the Christians hearing this letter read aloud to them for the first time.

Their lives looked hard. So in these verses, Paul wanted them all to look beyond it. To know where they're going. And how they're going to get there.

[8 : 33] So that they can keep going as Christians living in a broken world. And that's what I hope we'll all see this evening. This letter wasn't written to us.

But the broken world of Rome is just as broken today. And we need to hear the same message. In 1970, the Beatles released a song called The Long and Winding Road That Leads to Your Door. And I don't think that John and Paul had Romans 8 in mind when they were writing it. But it's a helpful title for what we're looking at tonight. The Long and Winding Road That Leads to His Door. Christ's Door. So let's dig into verses 17 to 30. Where we see this long and winding road. Paul presents us with the pattern of life for a person who loves and follows Jesus.

And it's one which follows the same pattern as Christ. Which we see in verse 17. We suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.

[9 : 37] Suffering now. Glory later. The cross must come before the crown. That's what our first section explains.

As Paul gives us a picture of great cosmic scales. Where on one side we have our present suffering. And on the other, our future glory. That's what he's weighing up here.

But what does the suffering look like? Paul explains. The creation, he says. Meaning literally everything you can see in the world. Including yourself. Is subjected to decay.

Corruption. In fact, it's enslaved to it. Which is why it's waiting eagerly. And groaning for redemption. This is not what creation was designed to be like. It was never meant to decay. Which is why it is groaning. Everything in the world we live in. Shouts out at the top of its voice. Death.

[10:37] Brokenness. Because in Genesis 3. The curse of death wasn't just for Adam and Eve themselves. It was passed on and down to everything in creation.

And it's been screaming out death and brokenness ever since. We as broken people living in this world feel that.

We feel that pain. Part of living in this world is inheriting pain. Suffering. Hurt.

Frustration. Heartbreak. Loneliness. Anxiety. Anger. Death. All of it.

And to be honest. You don't have to look far along your row of seats to see that. Our church family has tasted much of that recently.

[11:37] Our daily work seems unfulfilling. Endlessly frustrating. And feels like we're just achieving nothing. We're getting nowhere. The people we care for have been hurt.

And often we are the perpetrators. We are the guilty party. Parents. Spouses. Friends. Children. Die.

Our feelings. Our emotions. Our attractions. Have been twisted into something they were never meant to be. And it hurts. Sickness takes control of our bodies.

People we love dearly. Choose to abandon the Lord. There is real pain in this life. And there is no escaping it.

Paul doesn't promise it. And we shouldn't expect it. And it's only when terrible things like this happen to us. That we start to see the cracks in what our culture thinks.

[12:37] If you ever find yourself in a garden center on a Saturday afternoon. Living your best life. Then you'll probably come across a fridge magnet that says on it. Life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass.

It's about learning to dance in the rain. Sounds lovely. And it's a classic motivational quote. But it only goes so far. And it can be deeply hurtful.

It's certainly not something you would say to a grieving mother. It would be so cruel. The pain we feel is unavoidable.

Even the best days we have in this broken world are still tainted by the brokenness of real life. Our joy is still punctured with pain. Your bubble is only one heartbeat away from bursting.

You can be having the loveliest time with your friends. And then have it turned upside down by one unpredictable phone call. The world we live in is fundamentally broken because of sin.

[13:44] This is a creation-wide emergency. There is something truly wrong and sick with the world we live in. But it's not world hunger.

It's not Brexit. It's not toxic masculinity. It's not white privilege. It's not CO2 levels. It's not your plastic usage.

If all these things were to be fixed, it would be a better world to live in. But it doesn't deal with the real problem at hand. Which is why what creation needs is not what the world thinks the solution is.

The solution is surprising. And it's not found in a 16-year-old Swedish girl called Greta sailing across the Atlantic in a sustainable yacht going to New York to tell our world leaders what to do.

It's not going to stop doctors having to deliver bad news day after day after day. It's not going to stop families breaking down and tearing themselves apart.

[14:50] The earth in its current state will always be a world with suffering in it. What the world needs is said three times in these few verses.

Verse 19, The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. The creation is waiting in hope to, verse 21, obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

And verse 23, creation and we ourselves are waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons. The redemption of our bodies. When we are redeemed, so is the creation.

It's a package deal. We started the problem by bringing sin into the world and God is going to fix it at the time Christ returns to save us. And he will also save his creation.

The whole creation and we who love Jesus are waiting eagerly for our redemption when Christ returns. On that day, when ultimately that will bring about the redemption of the world as well as ourselves.

[15 : 55] The world will not be a place where death reigns, of pain and suffering tainting any good thing, but of light and life and goodness.

That's why the creation is described as feeling the pains of childbirth, because the new world is coming. We're waiting for the new creation where death will be no more.

I know we've already heard from Revelation 21 today when Paul preached this morning, but I'm going to make absolutely no apology for turning to it again. And as we read Revelation 21, please keep in mind the present suffering of this world and think of Revelation 21 in light of that.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and first earth had passed away and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 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 as their God.

[17 : 15] He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away.

We are waiting for the world where pain is no more. Suffering has ended. There's no more funerals to go to and Kleenex will have gone out of business because we just don't need to cry anymore.

We'll be in a place where we in the creation are perfectly at peace with the Lord our God, the one we love. And all of this comes at Christ's return and not a moment sooner.

That is our destination on this long and winding road of painful life we all share. All of our pain, which really does weigh so heavy on us and we see as so impossible to get past, so insurmountable, will be like nothing when he returns.

Simon Thomas is a lovely Christian guy who works as a presenter on TV. When I was about seven or eight, he worked for Blue Peter on there. And then a few years later, he joined Sky Sports News.

[18 : 35] So as my interest changed, he changed his jobs. As my interest changed, he did that. And because of that, I kind of feel like I grew up with him.

He was always near the living room in some way, shape or form. And when he was on Sky Sports News, he met his wife, Gemma, in a workplace romance. They got married.

They had a son called Ethan. And things were going really well. It looked lovely. One day, Gemma went outside and just fell over out of the blue.

They went to the GP, were referred to a specialist, and were told that Gemma was gravely ill without any prior signs of ill health. Three days later, Gemma died with Simon by her side.

Can you imagine for a moment how painful it would have been for him to have to go and tell his son that he's never going to see his mother again when he was so young? In an interview sometime after this, Simon was recounting the pain he suffered.

[19 : 45] And he said this, I don't think I'll ever find out why this happened. But if heaven is as good as I believe it's going to be, then when I get there, whenever that day is, all those worries, all those fears will just dissipate.

They'll go. They'll be forgotten. He gets it. He's been through great pain, but he gets it.

He's looking to the future glory where somehow all of our pain will just go away. Paul started this passage with these great cosmic scales.

On one side, we have the pain and suffering of this present world, and it weighs heavy. It's real. We feel that.

we feel it for our family, for our friends, and even for people we've never met. And we carry that around with us every day, sometimes feeling that it will completely crush us.

[20 : 56] But on the other scale, we have this future glory promised to us in Christ. And it's not just slightly outweighing the pain, but it's not worth comparing. As soon as the glory touches the scales, it hits the floor and our suffering lands somewhere a mile off.

It's blowing our suffering out of the water like it weighs nothing, like it's just dust on the scales. And we need to be clear that our present joy doesn't outweigh our present sufferings.

It's our future joy which does. We're not promised glory now, but later. We are a people built for forever.

We're a forever people, not a today people. We're looking forwards towards the goal, straining on towards that in the midst of our pain. Our eyes are to be firmly fixed on the world to come rather than the fallen one we inhabit.

We're a people of faith looking forwards towards what the Lord has promised us in Christ. It's this hope that we've been saved in. And this hope which marks us out as differing from the world we live in, especially in how we treat suffering.

[22 : 08] We're always looking to our hope, our future. But God knows that we're weak. He knows that we struggle to look beyond the present sufferings of this world because they just seem so big and so real.

So he helps us in our weakness today in two ways. Firstly, he gives us his spirit. God gives us his spirit who groans in our behalf when we are so broken that we don't know what to pray or how to pray.

We just cannot find the words. We as Christians have the spirit living in us and without his help we wouldn't even begin to pray and we certainly wouldn't look towards the Lord for help.

And without his help we wouldn't know what to say either. So he speaks to the Father on our behalf. The words he uses may be inaudible to us, too deep for words, but the spirit and the Father can communicate in a way we can't because they are perfectly one.

You know those situations you get when you're with a big group of friends and you've got an in-joke with someone across the room and then someone else will just say one phrase or make one joke or have one mannerism and then you just catch the person's eye and you just have a secondary glance and you know you get it.

[23 : 36] The Father and the Spirit can do that to an infinitely greater degree because their relationship is infinitely deeper than any of ours and is perfect in every single way. That's how the Spirit groans on our behalf by giving us the desire to pray to the Father and speaking to him for us.

Secondly, the Lord helps us today by reminding us of where we're going. On any difficult journey you need to know where you're going and why you're going through such pain to get there.

And the Lord does that. He says that in all things he is working for the good of those who love him. This verse has been ripped out of context so many times but it's just plain obvious that this doesn't mean that everything's going to turn out how you want it to.

That everything's going to be nice and go well for us in this life. The pattern Paul has made clear to us is that suffering comes now and glory later.

The cross comes before the crown. So this verse is looking forward to the future glory despite our present sufferings. All things work for good because we're called according to God's purpose which is shown in verses 29 and 30.

[24 : 51] For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed into 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. All things work together for our good because whatever happens in this life whatever pain we endure whatever our circumstances are it will end in us being glorified being redeemed and conformed to the image of the son.

We're becoming like Jesus and bearing the family likeness of our big brother. Because if this future glory is as good as the Lord promises then obviously anything anything however bad it may seem on a human level it will still end in our good our redemption.

And when we are glorified that's when creation itself will be redeemed and glorified too. We'll be a perfect people just like Jesus living in a perfect world under the perfect rule of the Lord we love. and that future isn't in doubt because God himself has predestined and called us to himself the day it's been set he's decided. Life in this suffering world is not easy but it's easier when we know that the result will be so mind-blowingly wonderful.

[26 : 33] And not only that but it's so certain it's been predestined God has already planned and decided this. We can and ought to be a people focused on forever not just the pain of today.

That's not our default setting as people but the reality is that what the normal Christian life is is that suffering now glory later.

that's what we should expect in our Christian lives. The Bible certainly doesn't promise a simple life. The Lord promises suffering division and pain with glory coming later.

Just like Jesus we're taking on the family likeness. That's normal life for the Christian looking towards the future despite our present struggles.

Forever is where our future lies. But we're not yet there are we? We're still in this suffering world in this painful existence we go through so how on earth are we going to make it?

[27 : 48] That's what Paul answers in the rest of the passage from verse 31 to 39 where we see that the long and winding road of this painful life leads to Christ's door.

we are people who know where we're going but are struggling to get there. So Paul asks several questions and all of these questions are designed to bring about great assurance to the believer to those who love the Lord.

So verse 31 if God is for us who can be against us? Everything in this world that intimidates us and makes us feel weak is a created thing.

It's part of the created order and we have the creator himself on our side. So why would we be afraid of anything that he has made and he rules over with his loving hand?

Verse 32 He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

[28 : 55] God's given us his son so why would he not give us everything that he's promised? He's put down the full payment of redemption by his son so he's going to follow through.

He's obviously going to do everything that he's promised because he's secured it already. It's only a matter of time. Verse 33 Who can bring any charge?

And verse 34 Who is to condemn? Have you as a Christian ever felt condemned? We feel condemned by the culture we live in.

Our culture does not agree with much of what we believe and it hates a lot of what the Bible says. If the culture we live in were creating the new world a utopia they were looking forward to they would make sure that people like us like you and me were not in it.

They would brand us as homophobic bigoted transphobic backward repressive and dogmatic.

People who certainly don't belong in the new world as they would like to have it.

[30 : 03] That's why when one of my friends was on a conference call at work last week one of his colleagues started passionately shouting about how bad a thing Christianity is completely unprovoked on a business call.

Culture condemns us but we also feel condemned by ourselves. As much as the world could make a case against me my own heart shouts far louder and makes a far more persuasive and convincing case.

it's got a lifetime of evidence which all points towards a guilty conviction. I know my own sins and I know my own heart.

It screams out guilty and you know your hearts. You know your sin greater than any other person.

Our hearts shout out that we don't deserve to be saved quite rightly I condemn myself and if you have even a shred of honesty then you will condemn yourself too.

None of us is righteous not even one. We have all fallen far far short of the glory of God. But thankfully we are not the judge.

[31 : 29] Christ is. Culture is not our judge Christ is. And he is not condemning us for there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Instead of condemning us he's interceding for us pleading our case to the father because he loves us. Paul's last question is in verse 35.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Christ. We are a sinful people living in a suffering world.

And that's what this psalm standing out in the text in verse 36 points to. They're grim words to read. But in that psalm God's people are hurting and they're calling out to the Lord for a salvation which they were still waiting on.

They were waiting to be saved. But in our waiting we can have certainty because we will not be separated from Christ's love.

[32 : 32] Tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword. None of that can change Christ's love for his people.

For the people who read this letter first for the church in Rome that would have been a deeply reassuring thing to hear. They were living in Rome under the rule of Emperor Nero the famed persecutor of Christians who regularly had Christians tortured and would sometimes take them to the Colosseum and have them fed to the lions for sport.

It's possible that some of the people hearing this letter read in their church were going to meet that exact fate. So those things Paul wrote weren't just random bunches of ideas he had.

He was writing real encouragement to real people in the real suffering world who were waiting for the future glory. And we are waiting to waiting for our salvation.

When you're waiting and in doubt about anything serious you want something sure something certain something tangible you can really grip onto and hope in. And love's not like that is it?

[33 : 51] It's weak. It's changeable. It's inconsistent. At least that's what my love's like. Are we really being asked to put all of our hope in something as uncertain as love?

But Paul doesn't ask us to put our hope in anything weak or uncertain. Paul says that Christ loved us.

Past tense. He loved us at the cross. We can always look to one specific point in history and say with total assurance and truth he loved me and still does today.

His love is the love which will never fade and never fail us because it has for all time been accomplished at the cross. He has he does and he forever will love us and nothing will separate us from that.

Verse 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God and Christ Jesus our Lord.

[35 : 15] The suffering of this world will not separate us from Christ's love. The arguments of our atheist friends who intimidate us won't separate us from his love.

The judgment we receive from culture won't separate us from his love. Our stumbling and weak and feeble attempts to remain faithful won't separate us from his love.

Our doubts in a powerful looking world will not separate us from Christ's love. Even our own death will not separate us from his love.

In fact it will only bring us closer to him. nothing is going to separate us from his love for he will keep secure those who love him through anything this suffering world has to throw at us.

And this leads us to ask one simple question which a three-year-old could answer with as much truth and conviction as a theologian in their 70s. do you love Jesus?

[36 : 29] We can be so reluctant to talk about our love of him but do you love Jesus? We find it easier to talk about being faithful to him about obeying him because we don't have to get overly emotional and well we wouldn't want to look vulnerable would we?

And I have to say that especially us men struggle with this most of us are just awful at it but at its heart the gospel story is one of love seen most clearly at the cross.

From heaven he came and sought her, his church, his bride. He loves us so dearly that he gave up his life. And what will keep us safe on our way to the heavenly goal?

It's his love. So do you love him? Because in verse 28 those who are called according to God's purpose, that great purpose of future glory, are those who love him.

Not long after I got married an older and far wiser Christian friend would ask me every time I saw him, Stephen, are you loving your wife? And when he asked that, he was saying so much more than was I just feeling gooey about her or did I still get butterflies every time I saw her?

[37 : 57] He was asking how was I treating my wife? Was I treating her with love? I would love you to think about that. if you've been a Christian for five minutes or 50 years, do you still love him?

And when you think of that, remind yourself of why he is so worthy of your love. Remind yourself of everything he gave to save you at the cross.

Remind yourself of his great love for you which will keep you safe even when our love for him is cold. and how it's only natural to respond to that love with love of your own. Remind yourself of how good and worthy he is and of all that he has promised us.

As we close, a word to those right now who don't love Jesus, who have not put their trust in him for their salvation, those who are not Christians yet.

I would urge you to read this passage again. For the Christian is full of certain hope, joy, assurance, future glory, and see where you stand without the love of Christ.

[39 : 23] The reality for you is that the present joys of this world are like nothing compared to your future suffering. You have no hope.

God does not work for your good. God is against you. You are charged. You are condemned. And you are and always will be separated from the love of Christ. so come to him. Come to him. Confess your sin.

Say sorry for how you have lived in rebellion against him and ask him for forgiveness. Ask the one who died at the cross for sin to forgive you and he will.

And Christ will love you forever and bring you into his glory. Anything other than that, anything other than the love of Christ will disappoint to you eternally.

[40 : 35] Only his love will take you there. And to those who do love Jesus already, in this suffering world we live in, keep going.

The pain we feel is heavy. It is real. And it feels like we won't ever get past it. And in this life that is partly true. Some pain we will just never be able to get past.

Certain things hurt so much that whenever we remember them, whether it's been a year or decades after, it still feels like opening a fresh wound. But despite all that suffering, the future glory, the new creation with Christ is coming.

The groans of creation aren't for nothing, they're the pains of childbirth. The new world is coming. So keep on going and take joy in him. Remember that.

When you look around the world and see all the pain and suffering which never seems to end, that this isn't all there is. there's something beyond it.

[41 : 53] As real as the pain is and as heavy as it weighs on us, there's more than just this present world in front of our eyes. We are a forever people built for eternity who are to be looking beyond the present suffering to the future glory which the Lord has promised us.

And remember that our place there is absolutely guaranteed because of all that Christ's love has accomplished for us. So as much as we have suffered, do suffer and will suffer after tonight, we can't escape it.

But we can keep going. We can keep going because the love of Jesus is real. And on that day when he returns, all will be well.

what a savior we have. Let's pray. Our heavenly father, we come to you as broken people who live in a broken world.

You know the depths of our pain and our suffering and our failures better than any other could. You know how deeply the heart of this world affects us.

[43 : 24] We thank you, father, that you care for us and that you help us in our weakness. Please help us to look towards the future glory. Help us to be a forever people, focused on all that you have in store for us.

And father, you love in his name, Amen.

Amen.