

Every Chapter Better Than the One Before

Romans 8: 22 – 25

- The hope that all true believers live in is not just about eternal life, it is about living in perfect shalom, with God and with creation.
- To understand what the Hebrew word shalom encompasses, and to gain a glimpse of what eternity will be like, all we have to do is to think about paradise lost. That is, to think about all that Adam and humanity lost because of sin. What we ultimately lost was shalom—perfect communion with God, perfect communion with fellow man, perfect communion with creation.
 - That’s what shalom is—perfect communion, perfect harmony—a perfect interwovenness. When we sin, everything unraveled.
 - The unraveling of shalom, brought the ultimate unraveling—death.
 - Because of our sin, the futility of the bondage of corruption and decay came into our world.
- But last week, in Romans 8: 20, we saw that God subjected creation and humanity to all this futility for a reason. What is the reason? To point us to the hope we have in Christ. Hope in Christ that reverses the curse of sin so that shalom—perfect communion—can be restored.
- As every human being faces the futility of life, they put their hope in something.
 - Maybe it is a hope to make a name for yourself.
 - Maybe it is to go through life having as much pleasure as you possibly can.
 - Maybe it is something noble like to make a better life for your kids.
- What you hope for becomes your purpose in life. What you live for. And we need that meaning and purpose, because without it we are staring head on at futility. You’re born, you live, you die.
- If a person is an unbeliever, all they can do is put all of their hope in this life. But it is a futile hope because everything in this life comes to an end someday, because everything under the sun, including the sun is dying.
- But a believer, a Christian, builds their hope on a resurrection that defeats death.

1 Corinthians 15: 54 – 57 “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”⁵⁵ “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.⁵⁷ But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

- Think what Jesus said on the night before he was crucified, as he spoke one last time to his disciples:

John 14: 18 – 19 “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.¹⁹ Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.”

- That is the hope of the Christian. Because Jesus has been resurrected to new life, we too will be resurrected to new life. This life is not all there is. There is an eternity of perfect shalom that awaits us beyond this life. For a Christian, this life is just a long journey—a pilgrimage to get to the Holy City—The New Jerusalem. Where:

Revelation 21: 3 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.⁴ 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.”

That is the hope that makes all the groanings and struggles of this life worth it. This is the hope that gives meaning and purpose to the Christian’s life. This is what makes the Christian give up the seeming pleasures of today, for eternal pleasures at the right hand of God.

- This is the question that Paul is addressing in Romans 8. What are the groanings of this life compared to the eternal life, the eternal shalom that awaits the us?

Romans 8: 18 – 25 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²²For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

- In the Bible, God makes a point of revealing to us what happens when we die. First, he shows us the resurrection of Jesus to show us that death isn’t final. But beyond that, God gives us the whole canon of Scripture, but especially the book of Revelations to show us what awaits us in eternity.
- I think the reason God does that is because knowing what happens to us when we die takes away fear and fills us instead with hope and confidence and anticipation. And when fear goes and hope in God overflows, we live differently. Our lives show that our treasure of living in communion with God is more precious than the fleeting attractions of sin.
- You live for what your hope is grounded in. For unbelievers, their hope is situated in this life, so they live for things in this life—power, success, wealth, happiness, pleasure, comfort. And when any of those things feel threatened in this life, their hope is threatened and so they feel threatened, and they act on the threat.
- But a believer’s hope is situated in Christ, so by faith their life is hidden in him. Yes, we live in the groanings of this life just like the rest of the world, but there is a big difference in how a Christian groans and how a non-Christian groans.
 1. **We all groan, but there is a difference in Christian groaning.**
- Now, I want you to start by noticing what Paul says here—the whole creation groans. Paul makes that point three different times in this passage.

Romans 8: 20 – 22 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²²For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

- Let’s start with what Paul says in verse 22. The "whole creation" is groaning. In other words, don’t think that when you suffer it has to do only with you and your

personal situation. You are part of a groaning that the whole creation experiences.

- Now move back up to verse 21. Creation is in slavery to corruption. Your groaning and your suffering in this world are part of a universal slavery to corruption. Your suffering is not merely personal. There is a much bigger explanation for it. It is part of something global. In all of creation there is decay, ruin, and death. There's something out of order and harmful about it all. It's not just you, or a result of something you have or haven't done. It is universal, not just in humanity, but in creation itself.
- In fact, as we move back up to verse 20, we see that it is all of creation that is in the grip of futility. Not just mankind, and not just anyone of us individually.
- But in these verses, we can also see the historical dimension of our suffering.
 - Verse 20 tells us that "the creation was subjected to futility." So, in other words, groaning is historical, something has been ongoing.
 - But then in verse 21, we see an end that will come in the future: "The creation itself will be set free."
 - So, between time past and a future still to come, all of history is part of this suffering and groaning. So don't think that you or your family or your time are singled out for suffering. This groaning is for everybody at every time.
 - I think this is what Jesus is teaching in the Olivet discourse in Matthew 24, and it is what the book of Revelations is teaching throughout. Not that there will be one big cataclysmic upheaval at the end, but that there will be continuing cycles of upheavals from the time Jesus ascended into heaven until he returns.
 - Like labor pains the intensity will increase as we get nearer to the time of Jesus' return, but the upheaval caused by the loss of shalom will be a constant thing that all people, all creation, and yes, all Christians will have to live in. But also, we must notice this.

1 Thessalonians 4: 13 that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.

➤ Let's tweak this to fit our context this morning by saying what Paul says this way. "We don't groan like those who have no hope."

- Everyone, all of creation groans, but Christians and creation groan differently than those who have no hope. Why?
 - Because Christians have the hope of the resurrection, and creation shares in that hope. That is Paul's whole point here.

Romans 8: 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

- As we talked about last week, the creation is on tippy toes with craned necks, waiting for the moment the sons of God will be revealed. What is that moment when the sons of God will be revealed? The resurrection.

Romans 8: 22 – 23 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.



Creation and Christians are both groaning eagerly as we await that great day of resurrection. We groan in hope. The rest of the world groans in despair.

- Let me illustrate the difference in the groaning. There is a big difference in the groanings of a person dying in pain from cancer and the groanings of a woman in the midst of childbirth. Both are in pain, both are groaning, but one is groaning in dismay and death and the other is groaning in hope and expectation of new life.

“At present we are on the outside of the world, the wrong side of the door. We discern the freshness and purity of morning, but they do not make us fresh and pure. We cannot mingle with the splendors we see. But all the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumor that it will not always be so. Someday, God willing, we shall get in.” C. S. Lewis

- Knowing we are on the wrong side of the door, Christians groan. But we groan in hope, because God’s word, the Bible, is rustling with the rumor which points us to the hope of glory that is ours in Christ.

2. A different glory to hope in

- Right now, the children of God do not look glorious. We look pretty much like everyone else. We get hungry and tired and sick. We age and we die.
 - We don’t look all that different from the world around us. Oh sure, on the way to the grave we may make some progress in overcoming our selfishness and pride, but we never get beyond the need to be justified by faith alone because of Christ alone, and we will say with Paul till the day we die:

Romans 7: 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?

- So, we don’t look all that great. On the outside we don’t look all that different from the world. We are not titans of the universe.

2 Corinthians 4:7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. ⁸We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed

- But yet, even as Paul speaks there about us living in the same bondage to decay that the world lives in, he also points out something that makes us very different from the world around us. Like the world, we are afflicted but, unlike the world, we are not crushed by the affliction. Like the world, we are perplexed by the brokenness and futility of life, but we don’t despair. We are even persecuted and struck down, but never feel forsaken or destroyed.
- Why? Because unlike the world, we have the hope of glory in us—a treasure in a jar of clay. What is this hope of glory?

Matthew 13:43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

Colossians 3:4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Romans 8: 21 the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

- The freedom of the glory of the children of God!
- When the day of our resurrection comes and we are glorified with Christ, our bodies and minds and hearts would be so completely renovated that nothing will stand in the

way of perfect shalom, perfect fellowship with God. We will finally be free to be what God created us to be, and because of that, creation will be free to be what God created it to be. What will our resurrection to eternal life be like?

- Well first, let's consider what the Bible teaches us about resurrection bodies. The Bible is clear that from the time we are born through eternity our life will exist in three different states, with final state being our resurrected state.
 - But before we get to the resurrected state, we begin in what I will call our physical state. This is the life we have today. In this physical state we have a spiritual being as well.
 - For the unregenerate person, that is the person who has not been made alive in Christ, the spiritual being is dead to God. This is why Paul says in Ephesians 2: 1, "But as for you, you were dead in your sins." Physically we are very much alive, but apart from Christ we are spiritually dead.
 - When death comes, physically we all die and return to the dust.

Genesis 3: 19 for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

- But even as physical death comes, spiritual life continues—the soul lives on. Remember what Jesus said to the repentant thief on the cross beside him.

Luke 23: 43 Today you will be with me in Paradise.

- Now where was Jesus' physical body later that day? In the grave, as was the thief's. But spiritually they were together in paradise, what we would call heaven. But neither Jesus nor the thief has a resurrected body at that point. As the first fruits of the resurrection, Jesus would gain his resurrected body three days later, but the thief must, along with us, wait for the great resurrection of the dead, when Christ comes again.

Revelation 6: 9 – 10 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. ¹⁰They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long...?"

- Now notice something interesting. These souls are still groaning even in heaven. They are not groaning because they are unhappy, or dismayed, they are groaning as in the pains of childbirth awaiting the day of the day of resurrection and judgment. I don't mean to imply at all that those in heaven are sad or discontented in any way. But in this state between death and resurrection there is longing for perfect shalom to be restored and body and soul to be united.

- Meanwhile where are the souls of those who have rejected Christ?

1 Peter 3: 19 in which (Jesus) went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, ²⁰because they formerly did not obey

- The souls of the unsaved get what they have longed for all of their life—separation from God and from Christ. They are imprisoned till their own day of resurrection and judgment.
- Theologians refer to this state between death and the resurrection as the intermediate state, and far too many Christians, think of this intermediate state as their final state the way they will spend eternity—as a disembodied spirit just floating around in heaven.

The Bible is very clear that just as Christ was physically raised from the dead, we too will be raised from the dead.

Philippians 3:20 - 21 But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body,

- What sort of body was Jesus's resurrection body? First, it was definitely a physical body.

Luke 24: 39 – 43 See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." ⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹ And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate before them.

- Jesus' resurrected body could be touched, it had flesh and bones. It could eat. It could be clung to.

John 20: 15 – 17 Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me,

- As we can also see there in John's account (and in other places as well) it was also in some way recognizable. For whatever reason, at first Mary and others did not recognize the resurrected Jesus but as he spoke to them, they did.
- But while our resurrected bodies are physical bodies there is also something very different about them.

John 20: 26 Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

- Jesus' real physical resurrected body could enter a closed door. I don't completely understand that, but I know ours will be like that. Why?

1 Corinthians 15:20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the **firstfruits** of those who have fallen asleep.

- The firstfruits are indicative of the crop that is to come. We will be raised like Jesus. Paul describes our resurrected bodies like this:

1 Corinthians 15: 42 – 44 So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³ It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. ⁴⁴ It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

- The physical resurrected body is very different from what you might call our natural body. Paul lists four differences here for us.
 - First, in verse 42 it is sown perishable and raised imperishable. All of us are in the process of dying. We get cavities. Our sight and hearing fail, but our resurrected bodies will have no such deterioration.
 - Second in verse 43, it is sown in dishonor it is raised in glory. A casket contains the poor, wasted shell of a body that will turn to dust. I can't begin to understand

the dimensions of the glory of our resurrected bodies, except in light of Jesus' words from:

Matthew 13: 43 Then the righteous shall shine forth like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father.

"[God] will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess, [a] dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly (though, of course, on a smaller scale) his own boundless power and delight and goodness."

(C. S. Lewis Mere Christianity, pages 174-175)

- Third, Paul says in 43 that what is sown in weakness (it doesn't get any weaker than death) is raised in power. Our resurrected bodies will radiate with power. There will be no weariness. We will carry out all the impulses of our renewed holy wills engaging in continually blessed, worshipful activity.
- Fourth, In verse 44, Paul says it is sown a natural body. It is raised a spiritual body. Natural refers to bodies that will turn again to dust. Bodies ravaged by sin and disease. But a spiritual body, while still physical is energized and ruled by the Holy Spirit. This why we have renewed holy wills, and the power and ability to live according to those will as a Kingdom of Priests in the Kingdom of our Lord.
- We won't just have new resurrection bodies; we will have new resurrection work.

Romans 8: 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

- All of creation is oriented on the revelation of the children of God. God made the universe for us, not us for the universe. We inherit the world; the world doesn't inherit us. Of all God's created universe which has fallen into futility, decay, and groaning, only human beings have the capacity to glorify God with conscious worship. So, all creation is standing on tiptoe waiting for our revelation – as glorified worshippers.

Romans 8: 21 the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

- Imagine what the world will be like when it is free to be itself. Instead of frustration, there will be fulfillment. When we consider the majesty and greatness of the oceans, mountains, valleys, forests etc. it staggers the mind to imagine what the new heavens and new earth will be like.
- In this new earth, things are new, beautiful, strong, coherent—forever.
- Instead of pain, there is only joy. This is why the best metaphor for the current state of creation is as being in childbirth—joy in the pain. Through the power of God, the world is giving birth to a new version of itself.
 - This is the future that creation can look forward to because it is the future that God's children are looking forward to. This is Paul's answer to the question about whether our future glory makes our present sufferings worth bearing. What is Paul telling us here? Even creation urges you to say: Yes! It is all worth it.
- We are heirs and fellow with Christ of this new world and everything in it. Just as the creation followed fallen man into corruption, so the creation will follow redeemed

man into glory. God will be doing all of the resurrecting and restoring but creation will follow our lead.

Isaiah 11: 6 The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them.

- Perfect shalom—a child will lead even the lion.
- In the new heavens and the new earth, shalom will be perfectly restored as Christ reigns as Lord over us, and we reign over creation. Just as God created everything to be in the beginning.

3. The difference in hope--Waiting with eagerness and patience

- Biblical hope is faith looking forward to a sure and certain future. Our hope is so sure that is an anchor for our souls. It is what gives stability to our faith. When we stumble and trip today, when we become uncertain in our faith because of afflictions, hope kicks in. We are reminded of God's promise for tomorrow.
 - That is the great explanation for the behavior of the saints of the ages who were willing to go up against the lions in the arena and to be human torches in the garden of Nero. They knew where they were going. They had a hope that would never embarrass them or leave them ashamed.
- When we live in the hope of the glory of Christ, we don't yield to the sinful pleasures of the moment. We are not suckered in by advertising that says, "You only go around once in life so you have to grab for all the gusto you can." We don't devote our best energies to laying up treasures on earth. We don't dream our most exciting dreams about accomplishments and relationships that perish. We don't fret over what this life fails to give us (marriage, wealth, health, fame).
 - Instead, we revel in the wonder that the ruler of the universe loves us and has destined us for glory and is working infallibly to bring us to his eternal kingdom.
 - We live to meet the needs of others because God is living to meet our needs.
 - We love our enemies, and do good, and bless those who curse us and pray for those who despise us because our reward in heaven is great and we are not enslaved to petty pleasures that come from returning evil for evil, in this world.
 - We live differently because we hope differently.
- We believe and trust completely the rumor that is rustling in the pages of the New Testament. There is a glorious resurrection that awaits us. A glorious resurrection that we can only barely begin to comprehend.

"The things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before."

— **C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*** (the seventh and final volume of his *Chronicles of Narnia*)

- This is the hope of glory that allows those who love Christ to groan differently and live differently. This is the hope that is yours because Christ came and lived for you, died for you, and lives today to ever intercede for you.