

Romans 8:18-27

Trinity 7, July 23, 2023
Pastor Sam Rodebaugh

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.²² 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.²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.²⁶ 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 too deep for words.²⁷ 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.

Let's consider two ideas this morning that we don't often think of together: "hope" and "groaning." In fact, they're pretty much opposites. We hope for things that we want, that we don't get to enjoy now. We groan because of things that *are* happening to us right now and that we *don't* want. But sometimes, these two ideas go hand-in-hand. For instance, in High School I ran cross country. And when you're running out there on that course, you're groaning. You're straining, you're in pain and tired, you're groaning. *But* you keep on running for the hope of finishing the race, of beating the guy in front of you, of setting a personal best time. So sometimes "hoping" and "groaning" work together.

That same connection takes place in our text, where God tells us about the hope that we have that is waiting for us and the groaning that we face right now. Paul describes it right away in the first verse: ***"For I consider that the sufferings*** (things that make us groan)—***the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.***" (And that's our hope.)

Now, there is one very big difference between the groaning and hope of a cross country race and the groaning and hope of our text. And that's the level of certainty. When you're running in a race, there's no level of certainty that you will win, or that you'll even catch the person in front of you. But the hope described in our text is not just something that we *wish* for, something that we can't see right now but *might* happen. The hope that God presents to us in our text is a certainty. It *will* happen.

We can look forward to our hope, to the glory that God will reveal to us, even while we're groaning, and we can do so because of Jesus. Now, you might have noticed, Jesus isn't mentioned anywhere in our text, but He is behind it all. That will be evident as we consider the theme:

Jesus Gives Hope in Groaning

- I. In Our Groaning
- II. In Creation's Groaning
- III. In the Spirit's Groaning

There are, of course, many things in life that make us groan. That phrase in our first verse is very wide: ***"The sufferings of this present time."*** There are the sufferings that we experience simply because we

live in a corrupt world. There are sufferings we experience at the hands of others. But the greatest source of suffering for a Christian is self-inflicted—it comes from our own sinful nature. This word used here for “sufferings” Paul uses a little differently in the previous chapter, to describe his suffering in his struggle against sin. In that chapter, which we read part of for our Epistle reading last week, Paul is struggling with his sinful passions, frustrated that he constantly does the evil that he wants to avoid. He eventually cries out, **“Who will deliver me from this body of death?”** (Romans 7:24) As a Christian, his sinful nature is a source of pain for him. It’s making him groan! And so it is for us.

Every Christian is both Saint and sinner at the same time. And these two identities are totally opposed to one another. There’s a battle going on inside us each day. And as Children of God, renewed by the Holy Spirit in God’s image, we hate sin and our sinful nature. And we feel the way Paul did; it’s a source of pain to us that we disappoint God as we sin against Him constantly. It weighs heavily on us. Our *sin* makes us groan. But even in *this* groaning, even in this suffering, there is still hope.

You see, it’s a good thing to feel this pain associated with our sin. As long as we’re alive in this world, our sinful nature is going to be alive within us. So, if there ever comes a time when you no longer struggle against sin, when you’re no longer suffering with guilt, it’s *not* because you’ve finally stopped sinning! It would be because you’ve lost your faith and so no longer feel that inner battle between Saint and sinner. That’s why we’re encouraged to keep struggling, to keep striving, to hate our sinful nature, to repent of our sins, and to turn to Christ for forgiveness. While we’re in that ongoing struggle, even while we’re groaning, we have hope knowing that *in* this life-long battle with our sinful nature, Christ has already secured the victory over our sin *for* us.

In verse 18, again, Paul says, **“I consider that the sufferings of this present time aren’t worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us.”** The word use for “consider” there means to “add things up.” Paul wants to do some comparing here, and remember, Paul suffered a whole lot. He says, *“Let’s take all the suffering—the beatings, the imprisonments, the thorn in the flesh, the hatred of the world, the sorrow, the guilt over sin—and let’s place that all over here. And then let’s take the glory that will be revealed in us and put that over here. It’s not even close!”*

In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes, **“For this light, momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.”** (2 Corinthians 4:17) He’s telling us that we have hope in the midst of all of our groaning in pain. Because what we’re experiencing right now, as bad as it might seem, won’t even be close to the joy that we will have through Christ.

But what is that “glory” that he mentions? He explains in verse 23: **“We ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”** He’s speaking about something that’s coming in the future, namely Judgment Day. At *that* time, we will have the **“adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”** And you might be thinking, *“Wait a second, haven’t we already been adopted as God’s children?”* And we are! Paul wrote just a few verses before our text, **“All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”** So *there*, he says you have already been made children of God through faith. We have been forgiven of our sins and have access to the Father through prayer.

But there is a bit of a “now-but-not-yet” aspect to this sonship. We don’t have the full rights and

privileges yet of being children of God. Right now, while we're still in this life, we're still stuck in our bodies with our sinful natures. We're still stuck in this wicked world. But when Christ comes *again*, then, He says, we will have the ***"redemption of our bodies."*** Our bodies will be made perfect! And *that* means that our sinful nature will be gone for good. And this is the *glory* that Paul writes *will* be ours, that we can hope for with confidence. John writes in his first epistle, ***"Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is."*** (1 John 3:2) When Jesus appears, everything that causes us to groan will be wiped away, and we will be made glorious like our Savior. That's our hope, and it's *assured* to us because of our Savior, Jesus.

But it's not just our bodies that groan, the text says that creation is also groaning, in verse 22: ***"For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now."*** You know, this is something that everyone knows. Believer or unbeliever, everyone knows the world has problems. We have earthquakes and tornadoes and wildfires, people are alarmed about the climate changing—the world is just decaying around us. And all of that exists because, as our text says, Creation has been subjected to bondage. It's *groaning* now, and *everyone* knows this. But only *Christians* know *why* it's groaning. In verse 22, Paul says, ***"We know* (and he's talking to Christians)—***we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth."*****

Many of you women know a lot about childbirth. When you go into labor, the pain is great. *But* you persevere because there is something you're looking forward to. Finally, when that baby is born, your sorrow is turned into joy, so much so that the pain is quickly forgotten! And that's the image that God is using with Creation. The fact that it's groaning now proves that something wonderful is going to happen. After all, why would God have let the world remain with all of its death, with all of its decay *if* He didn't have something in mind for it? But He does! On the last day, Creation will *also* be set free.

That's great news, because when God created the world, he set mankind as its master. And when Adam and Eve fell, so did the world. God said to them, ***"Because you have . . . eaten of the tree . . . cursed is the ground because of you."*** (Genesis 3:17) When the master fell, so did the servant. And as death was pronounced as a result of man's sin, death and decay has ruled in the world ever since. And it colors every interaction we have in this world: with people, pets, plants, even with our possessions. Everything eventually dies or decays or breaks down or crumbles. But when Christ died on the cross, He redeemed not *only* us, but also all of creation—even the earth which *groaned* when Christ died as the skies darkened and the earth shook. But now Christ says that He will come with a new heavens and a new earth. Creation will be set free from bondage. Death will rule no more. There will be no more loss, no more separation, no more decay. So, Christ will turn *Creation's* groaning into *our* joy.

Now, whenever you find yourself in a situation that leaves you groaning, it's always nice to know that there's somebody there with you. They say, "Misery loves company," and that's true. When I ran cross country, I loved the sport of running. After I graduated high school, I tried to keep running for exercise and realized that it just wasn't the same. In both, you're miserable, you feel terrible, your legs hurt, and lungs are screaming. But when you run for exercise, you are totally alone. When you run cross country, you're not alone! You have a team groaning alongside you, pushing you to run faster, encouraging you, urging you on. The team makes your groaning bearable.

Well, our text tells us of a teammate that we have that has been sent to help us in our groaning—the Holy Spirit. Paul writes about this starting in verse 26: ***“The Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.”*** And that gives us hope in a number of ways. First, it shows us how much the Holy Spirit cares for you, that He is *groaning* for you. That what you need is so important to Him, that He’s bringing it to the Father with groanings too deep for words. That when you’re so overwhelmed and don’t know what to pray, He has it covered. That His hope for you is the same as your hope: He wants you to be in heaven forever, to experience that joy and that glory.

And we can find *more* joy in knowing the Holy Spirit is groaning alongside us because the text calls Him our ***“firstfruits.”*** You know when you plant a garden, sometimes you start to wonder if it’s ever going to take off, if it’s ever going to grow anything. But when that very first bloom appears, that first fruit, you breath a sigh of relief. When you see that first result, you know that more is going to follow. And that’s how the Bible uses this term. If we have the Holy Spirit now, it’s proof that glory is coming.

Right now, it’s easy for us to forget about that. We’re in pain right now, we’re groaning. But God gives us the Holy Spirit as an assurance, as the firstfruit—the sign that eternal glory and joy *are* coming.

“But how do I know that I have the Holy Spirit?” Well, I can tell you it’s not what the Pentecostals say. You don’t have to have some deep emotional experience or speak in tongues to know. It’s very simple: the Holy Spirit’s work is to point us to Christ. If you believe that Jesus Christ is your Lord, that He has redeemed you a lost and condemned creature, that He has purchased you from sin, death, and the power of the devil with His own precious blood on the cross—if you believe that, you have the Holy Spirit, for ***“no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit.”*** (1 Corinthians 12:3) And if you have the Holy Spirit, that’s the first fruit. It proves that even though you’re groaning now, you can have a certain hope. You *will* be given the eternal glory of heaven.

In all of these ways, the groanings of our bodies, the groanings of creation, the groanings of the Holy Spirit—Christ has worked to show us that we can have certain hope for the future. And through all these things, Christ calls us to have patience, to groan with patience. I think back to running cross country—there was almost always a point in the middle of the race when you seriously considered stopping, when every fiber of your body was screaming out in pain and telling you to just walk. But you kept running because you knew there was a hope, there was a reason to keep going.

So, it is with us. When we are suffering, when we groan in this life, and when every fiber of our being says to give up and every voice around us seems to agree, we can keep going. We can keep holding out hope and waiting with patience. Because we know one who endured far greater suffering, who let out deep groans from the agony of His soul. But because of ***“the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising its shame, and is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”*** (Hebrews 12:2) That was Jesus. And *you* were the joy that Christ held onto as He ran His race. You were the one for whom He was holding out hope as He endured. Because He *won* the race, we can have a living hope, knowing that the ***“sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed in us.”*** Because He has redeemed us from our sins; because He calls us His very own; because He has called us to live in His kingdom in eternal righteousness and innocence and joy—because Christ has done all that—there we will be, together with the Lord, our Savior and our God. This is our certain hope, *even* in the midst of our groaning. Thanks be to God, in Jesus’ name. Amen.