

## Hope

Romans 8:18-25

I think I was about twenty years old the summer I worked in Indiana working for a fireworks company.

I got recruited by a friend from Bible College and shortly after the school year ended I packed up my car and headed south.

We lived in a dorm house on a campus of a local university.

We worked six days a week 13-14 hours a day in the warehouse loading and unloading trucks filled with fireworks.

It was long hours but overall the work was straight forward and manageable.

Things changed a couple of weeks after the fourth of July.

After the 4<sup>th</sup> the sale of fireworks pretty well wrapped up and it was time to go and collect the left overs.

The company rented a bunch of 24 foot Rider trucks and gave us a bunch of store locations to go and pick up what did not sell.

The days were equally long and significantly more stressful.

This was before the days of GPS so finding the right addresses, driving in big cities, and making wrong turns made the task a challenge.

I remember one time I was in a more rural area at the end of the day looking for a place to spend the night, it had been a long stressful day and I was ready for bed.

I finally found a hotel and after I checked in I did what I did every night which was check the load to make sure everything was ok.

I lifted the back door of the truck to find that one of the load locks had let go which allowed one of the sheets of plywood holding the fireworks in place to move which meant a big mess of fireworks boxes to clean up.

It got worse. In order to fix things I had to readjust the other two load locks and when I attempted to do that the other piece of plywood came down with the corner catching me in the face and allowing another big pile of fireworks to fall all over the place.

I was bleeding, tired, hungry, sad, and angry all at the same time.

I felt like quitting right then and there, but I thought about my commitment and I thought about changing all of that American money into Canadian to pay for my next semester of tuition and I carried on.

[Have you ever had something like that happen to you? A moment when you feel like giving up but then an expectation for the future reminds you of why you should keep going? That is a good way to define hope, an expectation for things to get better in the future. Now, not all hope is good hope. It is very easy to put off hope in things that won't deliver. Most of us if not all of us have likely made that mistake. As we begin the season of Advent together we want to turn our attention to the best of all hope. The hope of Christ coming into the world. In order to focus our attention there we are going to turn to **Romans 8:18-25**. The apostle Paul in these verses gives us at least four lessons about the hope of the Christian. These are important reminders as we live in a world that can so easily rob us of hope. The first lesson we see in these verses is that...]

### **Point #1 – Christian hope affects how believers see suffering. (Verse 18)**

If we count the cost of following Jesus in light of the glimpse the bible gives us of the glorious eternity that awaits in His presence, then we can see the cost as more than worth it.

#### Verse 18 begins with the word 'For'.

It is a word that connects what is about to be said to what has just been said.

The first 17 verses of the chapter say a lot.

In the first verse we hear those amazing words, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who in Christ Jesus.”

He has saved us from the law of sin and death, we are declared right with God on account of Jesus' righteousness being applied to us through faith.

The chapter goes on to explain that believers have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us transforming our desires so that we want to live as children of God instead of slaves to the sinful nature.

That conflict is hard. There is hardship and trials that come from that battle, but in that battle Paul points us to a future glory saying this in **Verse 18**.

[When I read that verse a picture of an old fashioned scale comes to mind. You know the kind that has two plates that hang down from an arm that pivots in the middle. You put something on each plate and the heavier object pushes the balance down. In the ancient world it was common to use a scale like that to determine the value of things.]

We should have that picture in mind as we look at verse 18.

The apostle is comparing the cost/suffering of living for Jesus in the here and now with a ‘future glory’ and he is saying the cost doesn’t even register on the balance scale when the glory is on the other side.

It is like having a few grains of sand on one side and a thousand gold bricks on the other.

Now it is very important to keep in mind here that Paul is saying this as someone who has sacrificed and suffered a tremendous amount.

He has lost position, power, wealth, and likely family for the sake of the cross.

He has been beaten, flogged, stoned, hungry, cold, tired, and sick.

In 2Corinthians 1:8 he says that the burden was so great that he and his fellow workers ‘despaired of life itself.’

Because that is true I think it would be an enormous mistake to see what he writes here as saying, “Suffering is no big deal.”

We are missing the mark if we come along side someone and say, “Stop your crying because your pain is no big deal in comparison to our future hope.”

Instead his point is to saying, “In your tears and in your pain keep holding on to Jesus because He is worth it beyond what we can appreciate.”

[Now that raises a question. Why are things the way they are in this world? Why is there hardship in this life? This is a critical question to answer if we are to find hope in the brokenness of this world. If the world has always been like this there is no reason to think it will ever be different. The Christian, however, should understand according to the Scriptures that the world was different in the beginning and it will be different in the future. That is what we see in this next lesson. We see that...]

## **Point #2 – Christian hope anticipates being free from creation’s curse. (Verses 19-21)**

The condition of this present world is constantly showing us our need for redemption, but when Christ comes things will change.

Again we see the word ‘for’ at the beginning of verse 19 and again at the beginning of verse 20.

Why is the apostle convinced of this future glory that will ‘be revealed in us’? (**Verse 19**)

‘The creation’ here likely means the natural world around us including, the ground, plants, animals, rocks, etc.

It may seem strange to us at first glance that ‘the creation’ would be said to be ‘waiting with eager longing’.

I don't believe Paul is trying to tell us that trees and rocks have feelings.

What he is trying to emphasize here is that there is something seriously wrong with the creation at the present time, that the purpose for which it was made is being hindered, and in that turmoil he sees a powerful display of the need for things to change.

Why is there something wrong? (**Verse 20** stopping at 'subjected it').

To be 'subjected' means to be put under the authority of something or someone.

In this case the creation is 'subjected' to 'futility'.

Commentator Colin Kruse points out something very interesting about that word.

He points out that in the Greek translation of the Old Testament that word is used 54 times and 39 of those times it is used in the book of Ecclesiastes and is translated there as 'vanity' or 'meaningless'.

[Ecclesiastes was written by Solomon. You may recall Solomon was incredibly wise and incredibly rich. The book of Ecclesiastes is about Solomon seeking satisfaction in the things of this world. He tries it all, building stuff, understanding stuff, acquiring money, power, fame, you name it. His conclusion is that it is all vanity, it is all meaningless.]

If all we consider is the material world then it is all meaningless and vanity because no matter what you do you die and for the vast majority of people we are quickly forgotten.

That is what the word 'futility' means here in verse 20.

Now, this is very important to see. The subjection of the creation to futility is done by someone!

The creation did not do this to itself.

Listen to what it says in **Genesis 3:17-19**.

Life is going to be hard and then you are going to die. That is what God has subjected creation to.

Why did the LORD do that? **End of verse 20-21.**

God subjected the creation to this 'futility... in hope.'

If you go back and read all of Genesis three you will find that God's promise to send Christ into the world to rescue sinners comes before His putting creation into its 'bondage to corruption.'

He subjected creation to bondage anticipating it being free from that curse.

When will it be free? When the 'sons of God are revealed' the creation will enter into the 'freedom of the glory of the children of God.'

God's purpose in subjecting the creation to futility is directly tied to the salvation of His people.

God put the creation into a state of corruption so that we would see no hope there so that we would look outside of creation, to His work in Christ to find genuine hope in a glorious future.

When Jesus was born, most Jewish people were looking for a Messiah that would defeat the Romans and restore the earthly kingdom of Israel.

He could have easily done that! But what would have really changed? Not much, they would have had a slightly less bad life that still ended in the futility of death.

Instead Jesus is born and laid in a manger. The king of glory forsaking worldly things and in that humility living perfectly for the glory of God, graciously dying in our place to crush the head of the serpent and free us from the curse of sin and death, raised up from the grave and ascended into heaven ruling over all things in anticipation of coming again to make all things new.

[Christian hope anticipates being free from the creation's curse. The unbeliever wrongly thinks that the futility of creation is the way it has always been at will carry on this way until it ends in nothingness. The believer knows that the world is under a temporary curse which has been broken by the Son of God who took on humanity in the virgin's womb. If we know that is true, if we understand that the creation will be set free, then something else should happen. That is the third lesson from this text about Christian hope. Not only does Christian hope anticipate future freedom...]

### **Point #3 – Christian hope longs for the redemption of creation. (Verses 22-23)**

It is very easy to be satisfied with what this present world has to offer, but the believer knows there is something better to be desired.

Paul makes it clear that this is about more than just knowing in our minds that something is going to change in the future. (Verses 22-23)

Again there are allusions back to genesis three.

When God spoke to Eve about eating the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil He told her that that He would “multiply” her “pain in childbearing”. He said, “...in pain you shall bring forth children.”

If we are thinking biblically then we will see children as a precious gift from the LORD.

In addition to every child being a treasure, we need to keep in mind that God told Eve about the pain of child bearing right after He told the serpent/the devil that her offspring would bruise/crush his head.

So the pain of childbirth points us to salvation because Jesus is born of a woman.

So the big picture here is that the pain of childbirth is anticipating something good.

*Paul picks up on that here as he looks to the future redemption of the creation.*

He likens the turmoil in the present creation to the ‘pains of childbirth’, pain that is anticipating something good at the end of the pain.

Now, quick show of hands, how many moms who have experienced the pain of child birth were wanting it to keep on going?

Of course not! No right thinking person wants pain to continue.

It is the same way with the present creation, not only that but he says, “...we ourselves who have the first fruits of the Spirit” have that same groaning/longing as “we wait.”

The “first fruits” is a farming illustration.

It is the first portion of the harvest that anticipates the rest of the harvest coming in.

He says we have that in the Holy Spirit.

*Think about what the Spirit does when He indwells a believer.*

What does He do? He takes a heart that is dead in sin and makes it alive in Christ!

It is what theologians call ‘regeneration’, it is what we mean by the term ‘born again’.

Why are we able to see the seriousness of our sin and our own helplessness to do anything about it? Why do we come to see the cross of Christ and His empty tomb as the only way to be right with God? Why do we have any love for Jesus? Why do we have any love for the word of God? Why do we fight against sin and pursue what is right? Because the Holy Spirit has made us alive in Christ!

That is the ‘first fruits’ of salvation. There is more to come there is also the redemption of our bodies, that is when God will take our

current bodies which are wearing out and transform them into bodies completely free from the corruption of sin.

That is supposed to be something more than just information in our heads, instead we are supposed to have a great and deep longing for that.

[The hope of the Christian is not to die and go to heaven! While our souls do go to heaven when we die we are longing for something more! Wanting to just escape this world comes from focusing on ourselves. Wanting the whole of creation to be made new and longing for the redemption of our bodies is longing for Christ's victory over sin and death to be fully realized throughout the whole universe. Christian hope is something far better than escaping a bad situation, it is longing for God to make everything right so that the whole of creation including His people will reflect and enjoy His glory to the greatest possible degree forever! That brings us to one more lesson about hope this morning. Christian hope affects how we see suffering, it anticipates being free from creation's curse, it longs for creation's redemption, and fourthly we see here that...]

**Point #4 – Christian hope is sustained by faith. (Verses 24-25)**

While we cannot see what is still to come, we trust in the certainty of the person and work of Jesus.

*The apostle drills down a bit into the nature of hope in Verse 24.*

Again we see the word 'for' in this verse.

The reason we are longing for the 'redemption of our bodies' and the full restoration of the whole of creation is because that is the hope of our salvation.

Now the very definition of hope is future oriented.

Hope is the expectation of something that hasn't happened yet.

That is true of Christian hope.

We do not see it at present.

*We still see a world in bondage to decay.*

We see crime, war, and natural disasters.

We see sickness and pain all around us.

We feel joints wearing out, vision getting weaker, and strength fading.

Even if we have all the money in the world, have every medical advantage, eat every vitamin, and exercise perfectly we are still wearing out.

The temptation is to look at that and to think about how long that has been going on for and say, “This is the way it has always been and this is the way it is always going to be.”

Another way of saying that is hopelessness.

The scoffer might take that a step further and say, “This is the way it has always been and will always be; therefore, the hope of the gospel is foolishness.”

I can’t see it therefore it will never happen.

Paul’s response is, “Of course you can’t see what we are hoping for! If we could already see it then it wouldn’t be hope.”

To that thought he adds this in **verse 25**.

I believe the phrase “we wait for it (the object of our hope) with patience” is the key phrase of this verse.

Commentator Colin Kruse points out that the “waiting with patience” described here is an “active waiting.”

In other words this is not a hope based on wishful thinking that has no grounding in reality.

[Millions of people have that kind of hope. Everyone who buys a lottery ticket has that kind of hope. The hope is win a bunch of money and everything will be great. The truth is only a very rare few win and even if you do win it doesn’t automatically make everything great. That is wishful thinking.]

The hope being talked about in this text is far better. It is a certain expectation of the future which in turn with shapes how we live in the present.

Why is it worth coming to church to worship the LORD?

Because we have an expectation of worshipping Him forever in the future.

Why do we seek to do what is right in God’s eyes?

Because we see that His ways are good and we are looking forward to a time when all we know and do is right!

Why talk to people about the gospel? Because we know that the only way to enjoy the future with God is to be right with God through the work of Christ.

Waiting for our hope in Christ looks like living like we want it to happen and like we believe it is going to happen.



*That is based on something far better than wishful thinking.*

Paul has already talked to us about having the 'first fruits' of the Holy Spirit.

He is at work in the world and He is at work in the hearts of His people. That is a real tangible reason for our hope.

Our hope is also based on the Person and work of Christ.

Jesus really was born in the town of Bethlehem.

He really did work and live among the people of Israel for a little more than thirty years.

He really did die and rise again in real history.

Paul, the writer of Romans, saw Him in His glory and that changed his life forever.

He really is coming again to make everything new and that is the glorious hope we have as Christians, hope that changes everything.

*Do you have hope this morning?*

What are you hoping in today?

If we put our hope in created things it is all vanity it is all meaningless.

From the very beginning of man's rebellion against the LORD He made sure to make that clear to us.

But the vanity of this world will not endure forever for those who look to Christ for the sure and enduring hope that only He can give.