

“SUFFERING AND GROANING.”

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Scripture Texts: Romans 8:18-22

Introduction.

What a gloriously beautiful week and weekend it has been. What a great end to the summer. Warm days, cool evenings. This is why we all love living in the PNW. The beauty of the mountains, the lush green everywhere, the rivers, lakes and oceans, the San Juan's. The cedar and pine forests. The vast variety of flowers and flowering bushes.

And that's just what's around us. How many of us have taken in the beauty and grandeur of God's creation all over the earth, national parks, Glacier, Yosemite, Zion, Grand Canyon, Hawaii, Alaska, Colorado, Alps, Costa Rica, Banff, Lake Louise, Cabo, Catalina. The star filled sky, the Milky Way and Aurora Borealis. And the wonder of the vast variety of living creatures.

The beauty and glory of creation reveals the magnificent beauty and glory of our supremely powerful Creator. Who has stood amazed at the wonder of God's creation and not worshipped Him and said, "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof."

Why does Paul spoil this by talking about creation in the bondage of corruption? As you drive around Washington or vacation do you think about the fallenness? Yet we all hear the news headlines of the miseries of life on this planet, of storms, floods, fires, tornadoes, hurricanes.

Paul is leading us step by step to understand our life of sanctification in the Holy Spirit. We have the Spirit of adoption making us sons of God and as sons of God we have an inheritance, we are heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ (8:15-17).

Then Paul adds that clause, heirs with Christ provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him (8:17). But Paul doesn't leave us to despair, he encourages us that the sufferings of this present life are nothing, not even worth comparing to the glory that is to come.

Remember how Paul said the sum total of all human suffering on earth will be like some particles of dust on the scales in comparison to the future glory? Your pain is less than a drop in the ocean of glory. He is going to now show how this is true by giving us an aerial view of creation and history to show us where it is all leading.

Paul goes cosmic on us and says look at creation. All of creation is suffering and is weary with the futility of it all, but it is looking forward with longing to deliverance and glory.

If you are suffering in any way, God has given this text for you. If you have not particularly suffered, your time will come, and you will want to remember this.

How often have you heard someone say in the midst of some great misery, or suffering, pain or death, I don't know how those who have no faith in God survive?

For believers there is something unbelievers don't understand or have. Hope. Preserver, don't throw away your hope. How do we know future glory far outweighs all the world's present suffering? Because Romans 8:19-27 gives us *three groanings*, the groaning of creation, the groaning of Christians/the Church, and the groaning of the Holy Spirit. We will spend a week on each.

Romans 8:19-22, the groaning of creation.

There is an element of poetry in Paul's words as he speaks of creation in human terms. Like when the Psalmist speaks of the trees clapping their hands and the hills leaping for joy and the mountains bursting into song. Creation longs and groans in *four ways*.

All of creation groans, meaning universally.

All of creation groans continually, ever since the day of the fall.

All of creation groans judicially, meaning because of judgment.

All of creation groans optimistically, eagerly waiting for the sons of God to be revealed.

All of creation groans, meaning universally, which is why we suffer and groan.

All creation, to the edge of the universe.

Creation suffers as we do. It became subject to futility, decay, death, the scourge of barrenness, the fury of the elements, wind, rain, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, blights, drought, famine, tsunami, earthquakes; pollution in the air, on the land and seas; the wild destructiveness of beasts.

When we lived in Oklahoma, we thought it was especially cursed because of all the different kinds of weather-related disasters, tornados, thunder and lightning, hail, wind, fires, ice storms, flash floods, earthquakes, extremes in cold and hot and humidity.

Our world is filled with suffering. Children get sick and die, adults fall and break bones, terrorists kill innocent people, planes crash, persecutions happen, millions of people are in slavery or being trafficked, refugees are displaced, corruption leads to great injustices. And then after so much disease, sickness and cancer there is the insatiable enemy death, relentlessly shooting his arrows.

All of creation groans continually, ever since the day of the fall.

Why? Because of Him who subjected it to futility. Why? Because God said it would. Eat of this tree and you will die. When Adam sinned, death and suffering and futility and groaning came into the world. But why did Adam's sin curse the earth and not just mankind?

Because God made Adam the representative head of mankind and of all creation.

The Hebrew word for man is adam, and the Hebrew word for ground is adamah. The consequences of Adam's sin affect the ground from which he was taken (Genesis 2:7, 3:17).

Genesis 1:26-28 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." ...

28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

Psalm 8:5-8 Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.

6 You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, 7 all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,

8 the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

Genesis 3:17-19 And to Adam he said,

“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree

of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’

cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;

18 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.

19 By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

When Adam fell, all creation fell with him, the people and place fell. This is how God made the earth. Do you want to know what’s wrong with our world? I am. We are. It is our fault that innocent creation was cursed and subjected to futility and decay. Rebellious, sinful human beings not only ruined their own lives, but all of creation, including animate and inanimate creation.

All of creation groans not naturally but judicially.

Was the curse an overreaction on God’s part? You know, the way we blow up over some spilled orange juice.

No, Adam and Eve turned their back on their infinitely holy Creator and preferred an apple to Him. That God subjected the entire universe to corruption should tell us something about how great their sin was and how great our sin is. It is an offense of the highest order, and it deserves infinite

punishment. Every time we see or hear about evil and suffering in our world, we are reminded of the reality of the horror of sin against a holy Creator God.

What is going on in our world is not natural, meaning nature being nature. It is not just the circle of life, birth, growth, decay, death. What is going on is spiritual, theological, judicial, it is curse and judgment.

The unbelieving world can't make any sense of it. It all seems so completely inconsistent with any notion of a wise, powerful, good, loving God. They can't figure out why things are the way they are.

The critics find natural disasters to be a great embarrassment and a scar on the character of God. But if you don't understand the holiness of the Creator God and how great is the sinfulness of sin you won't understand the curse.

All the heavens and the earth are compelled to suffer for the dishonor done to the Creator. It would be insulting to the glory of God if all the world just went along as if nothing had happened in the garden.

Excursus on environmentalism, global warming and climate change.

Let me give you a quick lesson in environmentalism so you can counter the lies

What do pagans do in the face of creation's groaning and suffering? They double down on trying to save the planet and stop global warming and the climate change. They stop burning fossil fuel, they look to renewable energy, they recycle and compost.

Environmentalists and scientists will never get it right until they see the spiritual connection between science and sin, between the environment and evil. Before the fall there was no pain, suffering, agony, no groaning. With the fall came groaning, distress, despair, longing, waiting.

“The creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it.”

The miserable condition of the world today is because of the judicial decree of God in response to sin. Global climate change is not outside of God, but by hand of God. It's spiritual.

Isaiah 24:1-6 Behold, the Lord will empty the earth and make it desolate, and he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants. ...

3 The earth shall be utterly empty and utterly plundered; for the Lord has spoken this word.

4 The earth mourns and withers; the world languishes and withers; ...

5 The earth lies defiled under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant.

6 Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt.

Jeremiah 9:12-14 Why is the land ruined and laid waste like a wilderness, so that no one passes through? 13 And the Lord says: “Because they have forsaken my law that I set before them, and have not obeyed my voice or walked in accord with it, 14 but have stubbornly followed their own hearts and have gone after the Baals, as their fathers taught them.

When we hear about some great natural disaster how often do commentators and environmentalists blame it on climate change, or just plain old mother nature. Who trembles at the theological and spiritual reality behind it all, who fears God?

Amos 3:6 Does disaster come to a city unless the LORD has done it?

Do you want to bring blessing and health to the land? Repent of your sins, believe and preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Stop worshiping creation and start worshiping the Creator. Be a good steward of the earth by living and preaching the Gospel.

All of creation groans optimistically, eagerly waiting for the sons of God to be revealed.

But all is not lost, this is not a permanent condition, only a temporary one. God did this in hope, looking forward to a day when creation will be set free from its bondage to the slavery of decay, sin and death.

Each verse points to a positive future.

Longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

Subjected to futility but with hope, it will obtain the freedom of glory.

The pains are the pains of childbirth. It is not meaningless or purposeless, but a necessary pain.

There are *two images* here. *First*, all creation waits on tiptoes with craned necks and eager expectation looking out at the horizon for the real sons of God to be revealed in glory.

It is as if creation understands redemption waiting to see the sons of God receiving their full inheritance. Creation knows it is coming and it can't wait for it to arrive.

The other image is creation groaning not like someone on their deathbed, but like a woman groaning in the pains of childbirth, longing to be delivered.

The pictures we take in the delivery room are not of our wives in the agony of delivery but in the joy after the delivery. This is what creation longs for. We are in the groaning stages, in the time of agony before the ecstasy. The pain is not worth comparing to the baby.

John 12 says if a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies it will bear much bear fruit.

God subjected creation to futility and corruption and death so He could bring about something much better, glory.

When a baby is born, it is a great revelation, a great manifestation, the day of delivery.

Last week we saw a glimpse of that great revelation when seven young people professed their faith in Jesus Christ. Seven announcements, seven foretastes of glory revealed.

The future is glory. Our future is glorification. Glory is the final destination of the children of God. What is presently hidden will one day be revealed. God is going to make a new heaven and a new earth, and it will be perfectly glorious.

Implications and application.

So what?

Sin destroys everything it touches. Sin has radically affected the cosmic realm, sin has had global impact, sin destroys nations, states, communities, churches, homes and families, marriages and parenting, individuals and relationships.

Sin has brought down a curse on everything. You need to get real and get serious and start facing it and repenting of it and turning from it by the power of the Holy Spirit. Treating it not lightly, dismissively. Be killing sin or it will be killing you and everything around you.

Deal with sin so that your suffering will not be futile, but will lead to glory.

And be sobered by the lesson of Adam, the wellbeing or doom of the subjects depends on the obedience or rebellion of the master. True of nations, churches and homes.

Suffering and glory.

Christ's path to glory lead through suffering.

Luke 24:26 Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?

Hebrews 2:9-10 Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

10 For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.

I Peter 4:12-13 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

II Corinthians 4:16-17 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. 17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

For the Christian suffering is never futile, never meaningless, never purposeless. Suffering is the path to glory. God has appointed suffering that we might share His glory.

If creation so hopes, if the inanimate world so hopes, how shameful is it if we don't long and hope all the more? In suffering we are sustained by hope, knowing the meaning and purpose.

So many of our longings and desires and wants and wishes are so earth bound. We are like what C.S. Lewis describes as making mud pies in the backyard, with no idea of a day at the beach.

Long for that day. If creation looks this beautiful in its current state of futility, subjection, and bondage to decay, imagine what it will look like when it receives the freedom of glory that we receive.

Long for the day when all sin, evil, death, sickness, misery, and tears are swept away and we are completely delivered and set free in the glorious presence of our Savior and Lord, when everything is made right and very good again.

Philippians 3:21 ... [God] will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.