

Romans 8:18-30

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[0 : 0 0] as we turn to God's word let's just pray for a moment dear God we pray that as we turn to your word now that you would just have that you would just pour your blessing out upon us we pray that by your Holy Spirit Father you would write your words on our hearts that you would shape our minds according to all that your word teaches and that you would equip us to live out every part of our lives for you in Jesus name amen well over the course of this weekend last night and this morning and now tonight we've been looking just at various passages in Paul's letter to the Romans tonight we're going to dive straight into what in many ways is the greatest chapter not just of Romans but possibly even of the whole of scripture Romans chapter 8 that amazing section of scripture that's just bursting with some of the richest theological teaching that we will find we're going to study in particular the words from verse 19 to verse 22 so I'll just read these verses together again for 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 corruption 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 the great theme of Romans is the gospel Paul is explaining to these Roman Christians and to to us how the good news of Jesus

Christ works and from the very beginning of the letter right through to chapter 8 Paul is explaining to us how salvation has been worked out in and through the person of Jesus Christ in doing so he goes through a very logical process he starts off by speaking about our condition before we are converted in other words he talks about the problem that we face and in doing so he highlights the reality of sin and the fact that it affects all of us he then goes on to talk about what happens at conversion and in many ways he focuses in on that great doctrine of justification by faith which as has been said in the past is the hinge on which the whole gospel turns but we could easily think that that justification is kind of the the end point of the end point of the gospel that's the aim that people will be justified but Paul makes it absolutely clear that that justification is not the conclusion if anything it's just the start and from chapter 5 onwards

Paul starts to talk about the amazing blessings that are poured out upon us as a result of our faith in Jesus Christ and the justification that that brings the culmination of that argument is going from from our past to our present at conversion to our the reality of life after conversion the culmination of all of that comes in Romans chapter 8 where Paul gives this incredible summary of the blessings that are ours through union with Jesus Christ he touches on various things he emphasizes that we no longer face condemnation because we are in Christ he talks about the freedom and life that we have as Christians he explains how God himself God the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in our hearts he tells us that we have the extraordinary privilege of being adopted as God's precious beloved children we can go to him just as a child goes to their father and as a result of that even if we suffer now these sufferings are not worth comparing to the glorious future that God has for us in this chapter Paul is describing the many many astounding blessings that we as individuals and as a collective Christian people have through faith in Christ that's what you can't have if you become one it's all a great reminder that knowing Jesus does not make a wee difference in your life it makes a massive difference both for now and for eternity Paul is giving this great summary of the extraordinary blessings that we now have if we put our trust in Jesus so in many ways Romans 8 is kind of focused in on the Christian and that's why it's a chapter that you can go to for a lot of encouragement and a lot of reassurance a lot of comfort in terms of your walk as a believer in Jesus but as Paul does that he talks very much about the blessings that we enjoy then all of a sudden he kind of goes off on a tangent and instead of talking about the same way in Jesus and instead of talking about us as believers he starts talking about the creation he starts talking about the creation

he starts talking about the universe and in these verses that we have before us verses 19 to 22 Paul talks about the fact that the gospel is not simply good news for people it's actually good news for the whole universe and in these three little remarkable verses Paul gives us a fascinating insight into the implications of the gospel for the created universe in these verses he basically personifies the universe in other words he writes as if the universe was able to talk like a person and so in other words I think what Paul is basically saying is that if the universe could talk this is what it would say so what is Paul saying to us what are the implications of the gospel for the universe if the universe could talk what would it say well that's what we're going to think about together tonight just for a wee while and we're going to structure our thoughts around two very simple questions question one what has happened to the universe question two what is going to happen to the universe so first of all what's happened to the universe well in these verses Paul is wanting us to start thinking about the universe's story

if you look at these verses you can see that that Paul talks about what the universe is now it says that there's a present waiting so he's talking about what the universe is doing right now then in verse 20 it talks about the past it says the creation was subject to futility so we're immediately getting pointed into the past tense and then verse 21 he talks about what the universe will be and so our minds are being drawn to the whole history of the universe past present and future Paul's telling us the universe's story and what is that story what has happened to the universe well that's a really interesting question because it's it's important to note and it's interesting to notice that the story of the universe is actually the very first history that the bible gives to us if you go all the way back to the book of genesis if you were to read through generous genesis in a one-er which is something that we don't often do and often we just read the bible in bits sometimes it's good to kind of blast through a book in a one-er to get the overall picture of it if you went through genesis in a one-er or you went through it quickly you'd discover that it's divided into 10 sections these sections are of varying length but they all have the same introduction they all begin with a phrase that more or less says these are the generations of so for example you've got genesis 5 1 this is the book of the generations of adam generation 6 these are the generations of noah genesis 37 these are the generations of jacob there's 10 of these in genesis that all telling us a particular story but do you know what the first one is whose story comes first well the answers in genesis 2 verse 4 these are the generations of the heavens and the earth and in chapters 2 3 and 4 of genesis we are being introduced to the story of the universe and that story has a beginning it has a middle and it has an end um the beginning of it is absolutely wonderful if you go back to genesis 2 you have this beautiful description of a perfect world that god has created and that beauty described to us in detail in genesis 2 echoes the descriptions of genesis 1 where god brings life and order into the created realm the beginning is wonderful uh god creates all this amazing stuff and and the high point of that creation the climax of it if you like the best and most important part is the creation of humanity of man and woman together and god's family being established and god creates this family and as god's people they are to dwell with god in his creation where they can serve him glorify and bear the image of god god himself the beginning is brilliant the story of the universe has a wonderful start but the middle is tragic and in genesis 3 only three chapters into the bible humanity who were created as this high point of creation humanity rebels against its creator and falls and that fall of humanity when we sin against god has changed the history of the universe the result is that not just humanity but the whole of creation is now under a curse god said to adam because you've 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 and very very quickly the order and beauty of genesis 1 and 2 descends into the horrible chaos of genesis 4 if you if you if you read you can go home read genesis 2 then read genesis 4 and just see the the kind of catastrophic fall from beauty and order into horrible chaos and hostility genesis 4 you find murder domination arrogance fear hostility the world that was created very good is now very broken and that shift from order to chaos is still very visible around us we can still see that the universe was created as a thing of beauty whether you look at the stars in the galaxies or the hills all around us or the flowers in your garden the beauty around us is absolutely astonishing but in amongst all of that beauty we can see that the world is also very broken and the world can hurt us and often people are toiling in order to survive and alongside that our relationship towards the creation has shifted from order to chaos back in genesis 1 verse 28 god gave humanity dominion over the created realm now that uh biblical concept of dominion doesn't mean that you're just kind of able to boss everything around and use and abuse something for your own good the idea of dominion in the biblical sense expresses the

idea of responsibility the biblical view of dominion is always with a view towards looking after that which is under your authority it's not an excuse to to abuse the world which we have been given so when god placed humanity at the center of this beautiful world we were to look after it really well but we haven't done it have we and through our sin we've rejected god's command to create care for the creation that we've been given and instead of that we think we've got a sense of authority over creation so we can use and abuse it uh to further our own selfish interests that's why history has seen so much environmental damage and we know that that's continuing even to this day it's such an interesting question it's an absolutely fascinating question why do humans destroy the world world just at a kind of basic common sense level it seems so foolish to willfully wreck our habitat for short-term gain um you know we we we think that sheep are stupid but i've never seen a sheep destroy their croft but we wreck our world don't we and people are so often destroying our habitat for short gain now many people are seeing the folly of that many people are working hard stop that but the reason that they keep on protesting is because humanity keeps on making the same mistake i remember being at school which i used to think was not that long ago but now i'm starting to think it was quite a long time ago um you know environmental concerns were big then they're even bigger now the lessons aren't being learned and we have to ask why do we do that and the biblical answer is

[15 : 27] that sin has brought chaos into the world and within that our sinful hearts have this desire to rebel against the responsibility that god has given us to look after the created world it's a great reminder that caring for the environment is honoring to god if you go and help at a community cleanup or if you avoid dropping litter or if you're concerned about your your electricity consumption you're not just doing that uh out of care for the world you're actually doing that in obedience to god because we are supposed to be looking after this creation but the result of sin has meant that creation has descended into chaos and the beautiful world that god made is now broken creation is cursed and paul uses three very interesting phrases uh to describe the condition that creation uh is now in uh he says that creation is subjected to futility it's in bondage to corruption and it's in the pains of childbirth now those three phrases are absolutely fascinating and if i was to ask you the question what's wrong with the world would you ever answer it by saying oh well it's in the pains of childbirth the language paul uses is really interesting we would never choose these phrases so what is he talking about what does he mean when he says all of these things about the world well let's go through them one by one first of all paul says that creation was subjected to futility or frustration i think is how the niv has translated it it's an interesting word it basically means vanity uh it's the the the word that was used in the greek translation of the old testament for the famous phrase in ecclesiastes vanity of vanities all is vanity the world um the word uh the world is subject to futility that's conveying the idea of of emptiness or nothingness or pointlessness in other words the creation has been broken so it is no longer fit for purpose so this world that was originally created to be a wonderful habitat in which we could live as god's people as those who bear god's image has been ruined it's no longer fit for that purpose it's no longer fulfilling that role in the way god intended it to as paul says it's subjected to futility that curse has brought a frustration a hindrance a hindrance and emptiness into the great uh purpose that creation originally had now all of this sounds like you know it's sort of maybe abstract theology but of course no theology is abstract because the experience of real life backs this up completely how often is life frustrating how often do things happen in the world that seem to make no sense at all how often do people look at the world and think i just can't understand what is going on there is futility all around us it's undeniable and that futility comes from the fact that we have rejected god and this is why people who reject god and people who take that that rejection of god to its logical conclusion find themselves uh coming to the conclusion that life is ultimately pointless people who remove god from their world view and if they think it through inevitably come to the conclusion that we are simply tiny specks on a tiny planet who live for a tiny period and who ultimately don't matter at all and so instead of looking at the world around us and thinking wow look at what god made for us we find ourselves

looking at creation and thinking is there any meaning to life at all Paul recognizes this he recognizes that the curse of creation has meant that the world around us has lost a key aspect of its purpose there's a pointlessness in everything now and that loss of purpose manifests itself in the next thing that Paul says about the world he says it is in bondage to uh corruption um that uh that phrase basically highlights the fact that the world is rotting and it can't escape that uh as it says uh it's it's not not willingly subjected to that futility and yet it can't avoid it so the beautiful world that god made

that was supposed to thrive that was supposed to absolutely thrive uh is now being spoiled it's rotting it's decaying and that manifests itself in lots of different ways you see it in the environment so the the natural world is the natural world is the natural world is battling against decay and ruin so you see animals becoming extinct you see diseases continuing to spread you see irreparable damage being done to the environment but it also is evident in terms of behavior you look at the animal world it's hostile in fact it's brutal at times and humanity we can only hang our head in shame in terms of how people have treated uh one another across the ages of history uh i i i think i say this in nearly every sermon i preach but if you just go and look at the news pick up your phone and go on the bbc news website and ask yourself the question is the world rotten the answer is yes and that corruption that rotting is dominant over nature at this present time creation is a slave to this corruption it's like an illness from which the the universe cannot recover by itself that corruption brings pain and sorrow and suffering into our lives all of this results in the fact that creation is no longer how it was made to be and it's no longer how it wants to be and that's brought out in the third phrase that paul uses to describe the universe he says we know that the whole creation has been growing together in the pains of childbirth until now and so paul is using that that remarkable image of childbirth to describe the situation of the world right now so you look at the universe you ask what's going on paul is saying it's in the pains of childbirth now what does that mean well it's teaching us two very important things number one childbirth is sore and so the current state of creation is not one of peace or harmony it's one of agony the world's situation is likened to the severe pain of a woman in labor childbirth is soar but secondly childbirth is a precursor to something wonderful because although the pain of labor is immense it leads to great joy when a precious baby is born and so while the image of childbirth very powerfully conveys the present agony and distress in the universe it also expresses the fact that something good is coming for this universe and that brings us to our second

question what will happen universe as we said the story of the universe has a beginning which was wonderful the world was created by god to be a habitat where we could live as god's family serving him and bearing his image the story of the universe has a middle that middle is tragic where the fall of humanity has brought a curse the world is broken and corrupt and it's no longer fulfilling the purpose that it had in the way that it was meant to be but paul also makes it clear that the story of the universe has an end interestingly all the way back in genesis there are hints of this in genesis 3 15 god promises that the serpent whose actions led to this curse that serpent is going to be crushed and then when adam names his wife eve he is recognizing that god's promise that god's promise has brought the hope of life she's called eve because she is the mother of the living she's not the mother of the dead she's the mother of the living that name captures the sense of hope that exists in the midst of the tragedy of the curse paul reinforces this point when he says that creation was subjected to futility as part of god's righteous judgment in the aftermath of the fall but that subjection was in hope it was in hope it was in hope of the valley of the foray verses 19 to 21, Paul is telling us creation is longing for that day.

Creation is longing for its future. But if we look at it a wee bit more closely, we'll see that we're told something absolutely remarkable in terms of what creation is hoping for. It says, for 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 bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. So creation is hoping for this future. You need to ask the question, what is creation hoping for? What exactly is the creation hoping for? Well, you could say, well, well, it's hoping for the return of Jesus, where everything's, where Jesus is going to come back. It's hoping for the restoring work of God when, when it's going to be made into a new heavens and a new earth. Creation is looking forward with eager expectation to Jesus coming back and to God completing all that he's promised to do. Now, there's no doubt that all of that is true, but it's not what Paul says. Because if we ask the question, what's creation hoping for? Paul gives us a very different answer. He says that creation is eagerly longing for the revealing of the sons of the sons of God. And it is hoping for the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

In other words, in terms of what creation is longing for, the focus is not directly on God. The focus is on you. As a Christian. Why is that? Why does Paul make such a direct link between the restoration of creation and the family of God? Why is there such a clear link between creation and you?

[28 : 49] Why does the universe long for the day when your salvation is fully completed at the return of Jesus? Well, I think the answer is as follows. As we've been saying, creation has lost its

sense of purpose.

It's subjected to futility. In other words, right now, the universe is not what it's meant to be. And so we have to ask ourselves the question, what is the universe meant to be? What's the great purpose of the universe? So when you look, just think about the vastness of it all. Think about the vastness of the solar system, the galaxies. Think about the extraordinary beauty across the world. Think about all the amazing things that you can see if you travel around to different parts of the world. Even that there, many larger away because you can see. Think about ■■■, and have God to be in a background so that you can see on behalf of us. This is the master's expertise for the total where humanity could live as the family of God. Therefore, the reason why creation is longing for the future is because creation is longing to be a perfect home for you. The whole purpose of the creation is to be a perfect environment for you to live in as God's people. And so creation longs for the revealing of the sons of God. It longs for the full salvation of the people of God.

It longs for the resurrection on the last day when our bodies are reunited with our souls and that we are eternally free from the decay of sin and the effect of the curse. It longs for that day because on that day creation will finally be able to fulfill its purpose. It will finally be a perfect, perfect home for the people of God. No wonder creation longs for the revealing of the sons of God because that will be the day when the curse is gone and perfect order will return.

And of course that makes perfect sense because that's simply taking the universe back to what it was meant to be in the first place. The universe longs for your salvation because the universe was made for you. It was made to be a home for you. It longs, it groans for the day when that purpose will finally be fulfilled. Now I think that's utterly amazing. The creation is longing for you because you are its purpose.

The creation was made for you. And surely that tells you how special you are in the sight of God. [32 : 06] Because if you go all the way back to Genesis, there's one thing that's abundantly clear and that is that humanity is special. Humanity is different. Humanity is not just another part of the rest of creation.

Humanity is the occupant of creation. God made this universe so that we could live in it as his family, where we could know him and serve him and love him and be loved by him. There is a sense in which the universe is an extraordinary gift from God to us. It was made for us as a place where we can live.

And it's very, very important to recognize this. And there's a crucial implication that arises from it all. All of this reminds us of the fact that a non-biblical worldview will devalue humanity.

Now what do I mean by that? Well, if you think about it, some people reject God and they just think there's no God and they're not going to believe in a God. And they look at the universe and they basically conclude that everything is pretty much pointless. So humanity is just another cog in this massive machine that originates in some thing or maybe in no thing. And eventually it'll collapse into some thing or maybe no thing.

We're just pointless. We're just ultimately nothing more than a thing in thing. And a lot of people hold that view. A lot of people escape that view. But if you hold to it, if you think about it too much, it leads to despair. It leads to horrible depression. So other people, although they maybe hold that view, they do their very best to forget about it.

[33 : 50] And they try to create an illusion of meaning in their life. They try to avoid the question of purpose or meaning because ultimately the answer is too hard to bear. So some people look at the world and think, well, it's pointless. Other people look at the universe and they try to find some sort of meaning in the universe. And so people will treat the universe as though it's kind of like a God in itself.

So nature or fate or something like that is seen as this kind of authority over us. And we want to live in harmony with that, live in harmony with nature, live in harmony with fate. Don't fight against it.

Now other people wouldn't explicitly call the created realm a God, but at the same time, they regard nature as something that should be served. So today, many people are sincere, really sincere, and really well-meaning in terms of their passion for the environment, to look after animals, to try to do good to the world around us. And there's a sense in which that's a really good thing. But the crucial point is that all of these approaches devalue humanity.

Because the view that looks at life and creation and says that it's pointless is effectively saying that a human being is of no more value than a stone or a rat or a germ or whatever. The view that makes a God out of the universe devalues humanity because it's making us subordinate to nature.

It's putting nature or fate or the universe above us. And it's making it more important than us. And the view that wants to care for the environment for the environment's sake is also devaluing humanity because it's making us servants of the universe.

All of these views are devaluing humanity. The Bible says something very different. The best that the world can say is that we can find our purpose in looking after the universe.

[36 : 00] The Bible says that the universe finds its purpose in looking after you. We are not pointless objects in a pointless universe. We are not subordinate creatures under the rule of nature, fate all around us. We're not servants who need to try and find some purpose in working hard in this universe.

The Bible tells us that you are far, far, far more special than any of that. You are created to be the child of God. And this universe was created to be the place where you can all live.

And sin ruined that. But Jesus came to fix it. And the whole creation is longing, longing for that day when it can finally be the perfect home for God's perfect family.

And this is where we see that it is in the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ that the whole universe fits together.

Never underestimate how big the gospel is. Because the whole of God's creation is centered on God's plan to make a perfect place for his family to live together in.

[37 : 40] And where he himself could dwell with them. That's God's great goal to restore the whole of the universe to be a perfect dwelling place for us forever.

And that's why when Jesus describes hell, he uses the word outside.

Because hell is outside all of that. The new creation will be a perfectly restored universe.

Which is everything that God wants it to be for us. And we will be everything that God wants us to be for him. That's God's objective, his goal for the universe.

He wants it to be a perfect home for you. And he wants every one of you to be a part of that. And all you have to do is trust in Jesus.

[38 : 53] Trust him and you will be adopted into God's family. And the universe is longing for that day when we'll all be brought home.

Amen. Let's pray. Dear God, our Father, we thank you for all that your word teaches us.

And we thank you that your plans and purposes are far, far bigger than we could ever realize. We thank you for all that your words. We thank you for all that you are.

We thank you for all that you are. That we are not just tiny, insignificant objects in a vast universe. But we are actually the most important part of your creation.

And this creation has been made to be a home for us to live in, where we could live as your people.

And we look forward to that day where we will be able to be with you in your new creation forever.

[40 : 06] We pray, Lord, that we would live out our lives now, always aware of that reality. And that we wouldn't just live for the day, but instead that we would live for that day.

That day which lies ahead in the future. And please just fill our minds more and more with the wonder of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We pray in his name.

Amen.