

Romans 8

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[0 : 00] We're returning with me now to the 8th chapter of Romans 8 and to verses 18 to 27, Romans 8 verses 18 to 27, and to the subject of the glorious future of Christians.

I think it's almost unavoidable at this time of year that we, on the one hand, our thoughts are drawn to the events of the past year, and as we think of the events of the past year, I think we have to acknowledge that there has been one long catalogue of sadnesses and difficulties and tribulations and catastrophes and all sorts of things like that.

Certainly globally, I would imagine, there are probably very few who would want to say that 2006 has been one of the better years of human history.

It may well, of course, also be the case individually or as families that 2006 has been a difficult year as well.

Perhaps a tragic year. Of course, there are many who, in their individual lives and the lives of their families, it's been a year, perhaps, of great joy. But I think we can't escape the fact that, internationally at least, it has been a very difficult year, to say the least.

[1 : 37] And here in the 8th chapter of Romans, which we all know fine well, especially, of course, the verses that we didn't read from verse 28 onwards, you have Paul contrasting these two aspects of the life of the Spirit, shall we say.

The opening of Romans chapter 8 introduces the subject of the profound liberation that comes through the Holy Spirit.

Verses 2 to 4 tell about how the Holy Spirit liberates us through the Lord Jesus Christ. And then verses 5 to 17, Paul talks about what the Holy Spirit gives Christians as he liberates Christians. And just very briefly, he tells us that the Holy Spirit, through Christ, gives Christians a new mindset. That's verses 5 to 8. He gives them a new sense of life, verses 9 to 11.

He says that we're given a new obligation, verses 12 to 13. And then in verses 14 to 16, he says that Christians are given a new identity.

[2 : 50] And he says that, as you understand this, there's this sort of increasing exhilaration almost. An exhilaration of intensifying hope, which culminates in this cry of Abba, Father there, in verse 15.

Now in verses 17, and in particular verses 18 onwards, Paul contrasts this rising hope, which is surely in the life of every single Christian, he contrasts the rising hope with the inescapable reality of the pain of the human existence.

And he declares that our pain is not worthy to be compared to the coming glory. And I think it's well worthwhile noting who it was who is saying this.

It's the Apostle Paul. And the Apostle Paul surely probably experienced more of the pain and the difficulty of human existence in his life as a missionary for the Lord Jesus Christ than probably any of us ever will.

So, just for a moment, go back to 2 Corinthians chapter 11, and you get that chronology there of what Paul experienced. There he says from verse 23, Are they servants of Christ?

[4 : 10] I am out of my mind to talk like this. I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again.

Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. I spent a night and a day in the open sea.

I've been constantly on the move. I've been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles, in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea, and in danger from false brothers, and so on.

And this is the Apostle Paul, and he's the one who says, What awaits Christians is far, far, far better than anything which any of us will ever experience in this life.

Much, much greater than even the very best that the world has to offer. In Galatians chapter 6, verse 17, Paul says, Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

[5 : 20] And yet it's that self-same Paul who says that present sufferings are not worthy to be compared with the coming glory. And that's really, when you think about it, that is an amazing statement.

And it's a statement, you know, that not just someone like the Apostle Paul can make, but someone which every single Christian is able to make. And should make as well.

In fact, it's worth noting, just before we look in more detail at what's said here, verse 18, Paul says in the beginning of this section, I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing, and so on.

That's a word which means, I've thought it over carefully. I've, if you like, weighed the evidence. This is not a throwaway statement, or a throwaway few verses.

This is something which is a carefully thought out, reflected on, weighty statement by the Apostle Paul. This comes with the great mind of the Apostle Paul, having weighed it out and thought it out carefully.

[6 : 25] Can I just stop and say something to the young people for a moment here? You know, there's all sorts of people who are called great thinkers. People with, if you like, great intellects, who have thought deeply about all sorts of things.

Science and philosophy and all sorts of things. Well, you know, one of the ablest people who ever thought was the Apostle Paul. Paul had a great, great mind.

He was a truly deep thinker. You know, he was so deep a thinker, that sometimes the other Apostles found it difficult to understand everything that Paul said.

Have a look at the end of Peter's second thistle. And Peter says there that our brother Paul has talked about these things, and he said some things very difficult to understand.

So there's the Apostle Peter, saying Paul is sometimes difficult to understand, because he is such a great thinker, a thinker inspired by God.

[7 : 32] The things that Paul wrote, the Lord told him to write. And Paul had this mind that could communicate some of the greatest and deepest things in the whole of the Bible, in the whole of the Christian faith.

Don't worry if sometimes you're reading through one of Paul's letters and you're saying to yourself, I don't really understand this. Ask God to give you extra light in it, enable you to understand it.

And don't despair if it takes some time. Because there are some things in Paul's writings, there are many things in Paul's writings, which people who have spent years studying them still can't agree exactly what he means.

But each time they come to him, they see things which they hadn't seen before. Paul is not just a great Apostle, perhaps the greatest thing of course, he's also a deep, deep thinker, and a man who was able to explain things which perhaps none of the other Apostles could quite get their minds around.

And here's Paul saying here, in this particular bit, I have really thought about this, I spent a lot of time thinking about it, I've weighed the evidence, and I'm quite sure that the sufferings which Christians are having to endure in this life are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

[8 : 54] no matter what we've gone through or are going through or will go through, the sum total, says Paul, is not worth comparing with the coming glory that Christians will be experiencing in heaven.

Well, it may well be the case that, having listened to what I've been saying for the last few minutes, you might be well tempted to ask, well, what will it be like? What will it be like, this glory that Paul's thinking about and talking about when he says these things?

Well, it's been said that scriptural promises about the life of believers in heaven can be summarised under five headaches. I think this is probably true, I wouldn't want to add anything to it personally.

First of all, we shall be with Christ. That's the great thing. That's the really great thing, to be with Christ. Second thing, we shall be like him.

We'll be able to look at him and see similarities with the way we are ourselves. And we'll be able to look at our fellow believers who are in heaven and we'll be able to see that they're like Christ as

well.

[10:04] Third thing is this, we shall have glory. That's a deep, deep, profound concept. You could preach sermon after sermon on glory, and I'm not going to try now, but believers shall have glory.

Scriptures also tell us that we shall be feasted. We shall be feasted. And I think that's something which is worth bearing in mind as well, especially at this time of year when families come together, Christmas time and at New Year's time, and basically a feast.

Well, the feast that awaits in heaven is far, far greater than the best feast that we'll ever experience in this world. Remember that Christ, the Lord Jesus, is looking forward to that experience as well.

I've got a feeling when I was here at the communion a few months ago, I mentioned this point.

Christ said, you know, at the Last Supper, that he would never, he would not drink of the fruit of the vine again until he sat down to eat and drink it in glory with his people.

The Lord Jesus is looking forward to the heavenly feast that awaits. Don't try to put too precise an interpretation of what it is, but the idea is there certainly.

[11:15] And the fifth thing is this, that we shall have some official position in the universe. Every Christian will have an official position in the new heaven and the new earth.

I was mentioning C.S. Lewis to the young people earlier. Can I quote from this sermon that he preached on the weight of glory at Oxford years and years ago? He said this, Someday, this is him speaking of heaven, Someday, God willing, we shall get in.

When human souls have become as perfect in voluntary obedience as the inanimate creation, the natural world, is in its lifeless obedience, then they will put on its glory, or rather that greater glory of which nature is only the first sketch.

You must not think that I am putting forward any heathen fancy of being absorbed into nature.

Nature is mortal.

We shall outlive her. When all the suns and nebulae have passed away, each one of you will still be alive. Nature is only the image, the symbol.

[12:28] But it is the symbol scripture invites me to use. We are summoned to pass in through nature beyond her into that splendour which she fitfully reflects.

Now perhaps that's a bit high-flown language, but that's the truth of it. When the universe as we know it has passed away, those who are Christians will still be alive and we will be experiencing this great weight of glory of which the scriptures speak.

And this hope was absolutely real to the Apostle Paul. In fact, if you actually read Paul closely, what he says is that what has been keeping him going through all the tribulations and sufferings which he's been experiencing has been the way in which he's fixed himself on the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and the way in which this glory is ushered in.

That's what keeps him going. And it's absolutely real to the Apostle Paul and it is so much more real and so much more vital and so much more important than any of the things which pass for things that are worthwhile in this life.

And just shortly after that quotation which I read a moment ago, C.S. Lewis went on to say, Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong but too weak.

[14:11] We are half-hearted creatures fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea.

That's the principle of it. So many people in this world, so many Christians indeed as well, I suspect, we are so preoccupied with the good things of this world that we can never quite raise our minds to think about the glories that really await us.

I don't know if you young people read Pilgrim's Progress. John Bunyan wrote that great book The Pilgrim's Progress which is very similar in some respects to the C.S. Lewis Narnia stories.

Well, in John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress he has this wee picture, if you like, of a man, I suppose, in a pigsty and he's raking out the muck with a muck rake and he's got his eyes looking down at the muck that he's raking and he's standing amongst and he doesn't look up and if he did look up

Bunyan has this picture of a hand holding a golden crown and this man in the pigsty is so preoccupied with the muck that he's raking that he never lifts his eyes and sees the crown that God offers him.

Well, that's the way so many people are in this world today, so preoccupied with what we're doing that we never think about what's awaiting all those who are Christians when the time comes to leave this world and enter the next one.

[15 : 53] You see, Paul is saying believe what the scriptures say and it will change your life. Absolutely. Some of us need to have our eyes lifted. I say that on myself as well.

We need to have our lives lifted from the present situation to what awaits us in the heavens above. And as Paul says, there's simply no comparison between our experience of pleasure or pain here with the glory that's yet to be revealed.

And Paul presents this hope as so real and so substantial that creation groans for it, he says. Believers groan for it and even the Holy Spirit aids believers with his own groans.

Let's look first of all at what we're told here about the groan and the hope of creation. Verses 19 to 22. Creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.

For the creation was subjected to frustration not by its own choice but by the will of the one who subjected it in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

[17 : 12] We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Paul pictures animate and inanimate creation as an audience eagerly awaiting for the sons and daughters of God to come into their true glory.

Can I draw your attention to one well word in the original but phrase here the creation waits verse 19 in eager expectation.

The idea literally the word originally had the idea of craning the neck or stretching forward to see. One of the Bible translators J.B. Phillips I don't commend his translation as a whole to you by any manner or means but he does have I think he does capture what Paul is saying here I think quite well.

J.B. Phillips said the whole creation is on tiptoe to see the wonderful sight of the sons and daughters of God coming into their glory. That's the picture that Paul is saying.

He's saying creation longs for the day of liberation for the sons and daughters of God. verse 20 Paul gives the reason for creation's longing for the creation was subjected to frustration not by its own choice but by the will of the one who subjected it and so on.

[18 : 44] Paul refers to the curse that came on creation when mankind sinned. As created if you look at the account in Genesis the earth was immensely productive it was kind to itself and it was kind to its masters it was a true paradise literal paradise but after the fall the curse came and the earth was no longer productive it had to be struggled with to produce crops for food and so on.

Paul says that creation became a sufferer it was permeated it was absolutely riddled with futility and decay and death and at times the forces of nature seem to work against themselves as well as against man and that's really what we're looking at today perhaps more clearly than we've had to look mankind has had to look at it for quite a long time.

barren regions of the earth deserts apparently are extended the fury of the elements you don't have to go just to the western isles to find the fury of the elements these days they're all over the world destructive instincts of the beasts the very laws of nature seem to embody grimness you know you young people have you seen these television nature programs on television about animals and things like that you know there's been quite a few on the television there was one that I was noticing over the holiday period before but the animal world it's really quite fascinating we're told that the animal world is a world of beauty and fascination and people go to Africa and places like that to see animals actually you stop and think what you're looking at much of the time the whole animal world is invaded by fear and violence as the predators prey on the prey and the prey run in terror from the other animal that's trying to kill them and tear them apart that's not very nice is it it wasn't originally like that loveliest scenes in nature witness bloody horrors in the true sense of that expression floods hurricanes droughts tornadoes tsunamis and the list goes on doesn't it these are what stalking the earth this is what the apostle these are what the apostle Paul is talking about and all the environmental abuses which we hear so much of these days sometimes it appears there's no hope but there is

Paul says so in verses 20 and 21 creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God creation one day will be delivered Paul says and the difference is the difference between agony and ecstasy we are called on to think of what it will be like when nature is free to produce what it was designed to produce and there won't

be pestilence and there won't be danger and Christians are going to see that day that's the principle shall we say of the groan for glory that Paul says is going on all about us creation groans and longs for the day when the sons and daughters of God come into the glory and Paul says that Christians groan too verses 23 to 25 the church groans and and and and not only so but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the spirit groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption of sons the redemption of our bodies for in this hope we were saved hope hope that is seen is no hope at all who hopes for what he already has but if we hope for what we do not yet have we wait for it patiently we groan for our adoption as sons and daughters and Paul talks about that of course he has talked about that in verse 3 before the adoption of sons and daughters of God will be completed by the redemption of our bodies we are already God's sons and daughters but we will not be complete for eternity until we get our new bodies and meanwhile we groan says Paul longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling we also groan because of the misery of living in our former world in our fallen bodies rather in this fallen world we groan because of the ravages sin makes in our lives and in the lives of those we love we do don't we we groan because we see possibilities that are not taken up and used and are so often squandered

[24 : 41] I suspect that most of us who are parents at least know something of that some of the time we all know people we all love people don't we who haven't achieved with their lives what they might have achieved and some of them have really just thrown them away we see gifted people who are wasting their lives and we so love to see it different wouldn't we Jesus groaned when he drew near Lazarus tomb because he was so burdened by the ravages sin had made in that family that he loved he groaned even though he knew he was going to raise Lazarus from the dead have you thought about that so we groan in our spirits we groan in disappointment we groan in bereavement we groan in sorrow in so many ways we groan physically in our pain limitations but we also groan Paul says for a positive reason we have the first fruits of the spirit verse 23 not only so but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the spirit groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons and daughters we would say we've got the first installment we've got the down payment on this fabulous heritage which God has prepared for us but we haven't got it all yet takes you back to the story of Isaac and Rebecca remember the servant went to get a wife for Rebecca from Abraham's relations back in Haran and the servant had taken with him gold and silver and garments and presents and the servant gave them to Rebecca and he gave them to her father

Laban as an indication of what was to come well that's the sort of thing that Paul is thinking about that's what God has already done for us through the spirit all who are Christians already have that down payment and we're longing for the rest of it what sorts of things are we talking about or is Paul thinking of well perhaps he's thinking of the indescribable peace that people experience when they're first converted the indescribable sense of having their sins forgiven perhaps we've lost that or lost something of that the thinking of the way in which at times of great difficulty and sadness perhaps God has calmed our hearts and we've experienced his power to do that but perhaps we haven't experienced it recently the joy that on occasions floods the souls of

Christians and we so long to have more of what's to come like that we wait eagerly says Paul in verse 23 the same word as he uses in verse 19 here on tiptoe as we wait for our deliverance it's underlined in verses 24 and 25 and we wait on tiptoe with perseverance says Paul because Christians already have a foretaste of these marvellous joys that are yet to come so the church groans and hopes and then in verses 26 and verse 27 there's the groans and the hopes of the Holy Spirit himself in the same way the Spirit helps us in our weakness we do not know what we ought to pray for but the

Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express and he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will at times you know if we're honest we find ourselves unable to pray I think probably most people have experienced that most Christians it might be because of illness it might be because of bereavement it might be because of devastating criticisms which have been made by other by fellow Christians of our life or our conduct or whatever but the Spirit we're told intercedes in situations like that it might be something to do with the future because there may well be times that lie ahead for all of us or at least some of us like that one day some of us will be lying in hospital with catheters and

IV drips and whatever and we won't have the strength of the will to put two thoughts together perhaps or it might be that our minds will have gone and so far as our loved ones will be able to tell

we're not capable of thinking even one serious sensible rational thought but Paul tells us that the spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express the Holy Spirit expresses the things we can't articulate but which we feel and Paul uses a very interesting word at the beginning early on in verse 26 in the same way the spirit helps us it seems a very simple word but in the original Greek it's actually a fascinating word it's a word which Paul has made up himself doesn't exist in any of the dictionaries apart from

[31 : 22] Bible New Testament dictionaries and he's put it together from three different words he says that the Holy Spirit lays hold of our weakness or weaknesses rather along with us and he carries his part of the burden facing us just to translate this word as helps is just it's just not really fully adequate to what the Greek actually says on the thing he's taken two participles and stuck them onto this word which is a fairly standard word the Holy Spirit lays hold of our weaknesses along with us and carries his part of the burden facing us the word facing is there and I think the best way of thinking about it is the two people carrying a log of wood and they're carrying it facing each other and it's too heavy for one to carry so the other helps and you're looking up the other for each other in order to make certain that you don't go too fast or you don't go too far to the right or to the left you're doing it together and Paul is saying that's how the Holy Spirit helps

Christians the Holy Spirit helps us keeping his eye on us seeing what our needs are seeing when we're going to trip seeing when we're about to let go and he helps us like that isn't that a marvel situation to be in the Lord loves his people individually like that so when we ask for the help of the Spirit that's what we're asking for you young people you can understand that can't you you're carrying something with your mum or your dad and you couldn't possibly carry it yourself and there they are helping you to do it and they're aware that your small hands might get slippery or mightn't be strong enough to hold it and they're ready to help you a bit or to put it down when you're ready take it up again when you're strong enough that's even to take the hold of it themselves until you get your strength back

God's Holy Spirit he helps you if you're a believer if you're a Christian like that you mightn't have realised it but that's what the Holy Spirit has been doing for us all in 2006 and that's what he's willing to do that's what he will do and that's what he'll do how to do like that God