

Creation Groans

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Preacher: Matthew Capone

[0 : 00] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone and I'm one of the pastors here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church and it's my joy to bring God's word to you this morning.

We're continuing our series in the book of Romans. The book of Romans is a letter written by the Apostle Paul in the 50s AD. It's called Romans because he writes it to the churches in the city of Rome.

This letter is about the gospel. It's about the good news of Jesus' life and death and resurrection. And we are working through chapter 8 which is about life in the spirit, that is the Holy Spirit. And last week we focused on verse 18 which talks about the new heavens and the new earth to come. You remember we saw that whatever we believe about the future determines our actions in the present.

Paul reminds us then of our future hope of glory with God in heaven. The next couple weeks Paul is going to continue to talk about that future glory.

[1 : 08] This week it's that future glory as it relates to the natural world, to creation. So the mountains, the seas, the sky, the plants, the animals, the entire created world.

That's our topic this morning. I'm going to read again verse 18 but since we talked about it last week our focus will be on verses 19 through 22.

So I invite you to turn with me now to Romans chapter 8. You'll find it on page 6 of your worship guide. As we come to it remember that Psalm 19 tells us that God's word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold.

And that it is sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb. And so that's why we read now Romans chapter 8 starting in verse 18. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

For the 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.

[2 : 31] For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word.

Our Father in heaven, we do again thank you and praise you for your word. Your word which brought something out of nothing at the beginning of the world.

Your word which brings dead things to life. Your word which takes men and women, gives them your spirit.

Father, we ask that you'd be at work in a powerful way by that same word this morning. That you would use it to change and transform us. You'd use it to make us look more and more like Jesus. And you'd use it to grow our hope and our vision of him. You'd set our eyes where they need to be. On the future that you are preparing for us in heaven.

[3 : 32] That it would direct and shape and guide how we live now. We ask all of these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. I mentioned during the announcements, I think that Easter is coming up on us very fast.

And next week is actually Palm Sunday, the Sunday before Easter. And that's the Sunday before Jesus' death and his resurrection. And on that Sunday, Jesus enters Jerusalem, known as his triumphal entry.

And it's called Palm Sunday because the crowds welcome him to Jerusalem waving palm branches. Now they don't just wave, they're also shouting. They say this, Hosanna to the son of David.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. Now you might be wondering, why in the world am I bringing up Palm Sunday as we talk about Romans chapter 8, verses 18 through 22.

And the reason is this. All four of the gospels tell us about this. But Luke in chapter 19 adds a detail that no one else includes. In Luke's gospel, the Pharisees tell Jesus to tell the crowds to shut up.

[4 : 46] Remember, the crowd is shouting. They're not just waving palm branches. And Jesus has this famous reply. He says, I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.

Now there's an enormous amount of theology packed up in that one statement. Tells us something about worship. That is, God must be worshipped.

If we won't, the rocks will. Which reminds us of how important our task is this morning. What matters for this passage is the relationship between creation and humanity.

Some theologians explain it this way. In the book of Genesis, God places humanity as his representatives on earth.

That there's this two-way representation. We represent God to his creation. And then we represent the creation back to God. So we are these stewards, these caretakers of the earth.

[5 : 48] And there's a sense that when we worship, we're actually representing all of God's creation. So the rocks don't have to cry out because we do.

The point is this, as we look at Romans chapter 8. The destination of humanity and the destination of creation are tied up together.

Okay? Creation is not just accidental. It's a critical part of God's plan, his purposes for the world. So what does that have to do with Romans?

Well, it's not just that we wait for the future glory. That's what we looked at last week in verse 18. But the creation longs for it as well.

Verse 19. For the creation waits with eager longing. Now that Greek word for eager longing literally means a stretching of the neck.

[6 : 48] Okay? So creation is kind of straining its neck out to see what's coming. What's going to happen? When are the sons of God going to be revealed?

The New Testament in modern English says it this way. The whole creation is on tiptoe. So creation is standing up and straining its neck and looking, waiting, longing, groaning for God's redemption to come.

Why? What exactly is it on tiptoe for? Well, verse 19 again tells us it is straining its neck to see the revealing of the sons of God.

If you were here with us last week, you'll remember, or maybe even two weeks ago, that sons of God is inheritance language. The sons are the heirs. So whether you're a man or a woman, if you're following Jesus in faith, you are in a sense a son of God.

So there's these sons of God and there's going to be a revealing. That's what creation is looking towards. What is this revealing going to show? Well, it's going to be the glory that we talked about last week.

[8 : 04] So this revelation, there's going to be new bodies. There's going to be, we're going to be sinless. Our addictions are removed. Our impurities are done away with. Our rough edges are gone. Everything we were made and created to be is realized.

That's the glory. That's what creation can't wait to see. Now, Paul's ultimate point, and we'll talk about this a little bit more later on, is not about creation, actually.

Paul's ultimate point is to encourage us. He's building on verse 18. Remember, verse 18 said, The sufferings of this present age are not even worth comparing with how great the future is.

And you know what? The greatness of this future is impossible for you right now to comprehend how good the future glory is. This is what Paul's saying. But let me give you an idea of how good it is.

The future glory is so good that even the trees can't wait to see it. The future glory is so good that the birds can't wait.

[9 : 11] And if the trees are on tiptoe, if they are stretching out their necks to see what it is that God is bringing to the entire world by virtue of his redemption, we should do the same.

Creation can't wait. Can you? That's Paul's point here. Now, why does this revealing of the sons of God matter to creation?

It is not just a spectator sport. Verse 20 states it negatively, and then verse 21 positively. So first, verse 20, For the creation was subjected to futility.

Paul is saying creation is hurting. Entire species of animals go extinct. Oceans are polluted by oil spills.

Oceans, crops are lost to drought. So on and on and on. And we know why. We already read it.

[10:28] Genesis chapter 3 this morning. Jim read it for us. Creation is subject to futility because of God's punishment. God's punishment on the world because of Adam and Eve's sin.

The first verse Jim read for us this morning, verse 17. Because of Adam and Eve's sin, God says this, Cursed is the ground because of you.

So creation is thwarted. Can't reach its ultimate purpose. Can't hit its full potential. Verse 21 calls it a bondage to corruption. We might say it this way.

Trees get diseases just like people do. The fall affects everything. It does not just affect us. It affects all of God's world.

Verse 20 then goes on to say, Not willingly, but because of him who subjected it. In other words, creation didn't have a say in this. It just happened to be tied up.

[11:30] Remember we said the destination of humanity and the destination of creation are intimately connected. And so when man fell, the world suffered.

So the point is this. Creation now suffers under the curse on the earth because of Adam and Eve's sin.

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Because of our sin too. That's part of why it's groaning. Verse 20 ends positively though. It was subjected in hope.

In other words, that curse is not the end of the story. And Paul goes on to explain that hope for us in verse 21 where he speaks positively. The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

[12:36] Remember, I've said it a few times now. Destination of creation, the destiny of humanity are tied up together. So creation suffers a curse because of humanity's sin.

That's the futility of verse 20. If that is true, if negative consequences from mankind overflow into creation, the opposite is also true.

Redemption for mankind will also overflow into creation. Creation suffers a curse now. Creation will experience a blessing then.

So verse 20, saying it negatively, creation suffers under the curse because of sin. Verse 21 sets it positively. But, and, creation will one day flourish.

Creation will one day reach its full potential. The world will accomplish everything God designed it to be. So, creation, God's world, right now, suffers under the curse on the earth.

[13:50] Creation, God's world, right now, longs to be released from that curse so it can experience blessing and fullness.

It's not just man that suffers, but the world as well. Then in verse 22, Paul goes on to clarify even more the type of suffering that he's talking about.

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

And that birth pains that he's referring to, the pains of childbirth, helps us understand the type of suffering we're talking about, helps us understand the end of that suffering.

So one commentator, John Murray, compares birth pains as the opposite of death pains. Birth pains is leading towards something. It's leading towards new life and joy and celebration.

Death pains is leading to nothing but death. So death pains are the beginning of the end. Birth pains are the beginning of the beginning.

[15:06] Death pains are the beginning of the end. Birth pains are the beginning of the beginning.

What happens after birth pains, but joy, new life, right? So when we see decay and disease and sickness, we know where it's headed.

It's not headed to death. No, it's headed to life. It's not a death rattle. It's a birth pain. And you can endure the suffering of birth pains.

Someone had to endure it for you to be here this morning. And you endure it because you know the future that is coming. You endure it because you know that new life is coming forth.

Paul's saying the same thing about our sufferings now. Back to verse 18. The future that's to come cannot be compared with our sufferings now. That's how big the gap is.

Whatever suffering you are going through in this life, it is a birth pain leading to something great. Remember, Romans is the fifth gospel.

[16:22] What Paul teaches, Jesus taught first. Jesus also speaks about our suffering as a birth pang. This is from John chapter 16. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy.

When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come. But when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish for joy that a human being has been born into the world.

No longer remembers. Did you hear that? That sounds a lot like verse 18. The future to come is not worth comparing with the sufferings of the present.

Jesus then finishes with this. So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.

That's the type of suffering that you're in now. You are in birth pain suffering. And when the future comes, you will no longer remember the anguish.

[17:49] For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. Now, what's the point of all this?

What is it that we learn from Paul bringing up creation? Many things. I'll focus on just a few of them this morning. First of all, this reminds us of the great value and worth of God's created world.

If God's going to redeem it, that means God cares about it. And if God cares deeply about it, that means we are to care for it as well. So in the book of Genesis, if you're familiar, God comes and he gives mankind dominion over the earth.

And some Christians say, okay, well we have dominion. God's given that to us, so it doesn't matter how we treat the world. False. The dominion that God has given humanity is meant to be a dominion that represents God's love and care for his creation.

We're representing God to the earth and God cares so much about his creation that he is going to include it in his redemption and that creation right now is on its tiptoes looking forward to that.

[19:14] How much then, how well, should we care for God's world? You can find this in various parts of the Bible.

My favorite one is in Proverbs chapter 12, which says this, whoever is righteous has regard for the life of his beast, that is his animals. But the mercy of the wicked is cruel.

In other words, there's something about the way that you treat animals in this world that reveals your faith in God. Whoever is righteous has regard for the life of his beast.

So God cares greatly for the created world. We do as well. We also learned something in this passage about the nature of redemption.

God is not just bringing us to glory. He's bringing the entire world to glory. So it's what some people call cosmic redemption. It's certainly not less than God's salvation of you from the punishment due you to your sin.

[20:22] It's not less than that, but it is so much more than that. It is not just the salvation of individuals, of God's people, but the redemption, the restoration, the renewal of the entire world.

It is the new heavens and the new earth. So we learned something about the value of creation. We learned something about the nature of redemption.

We also learned something about the character of God, which is that God does not give up on what he has made. God does not abandon his creation.

No, he includes it as part of his redemption. We might put it another way. God refuses to let evil win over anything he has made.

One theologian points out that if God did not redeem his creation, in a sense, he would be saying to the devil, yeah, you can have that. You can win over that part, that piece.

[21:29] But no, God is going to win in every way. We know that, most of all, because God himself entered into creation.

God shows his commitment to this world by becoming a part of it. Jesus takes on humanity, not just for a time. No, Jesus takes it on permanently.

Jesus, right now, still has a physical body. And he has a physical body as he is seated with God the Father in heaven, sitting at his right hand, waiting to return in glory.

That's how much God cares about this world. That's how much value he gives to our existence, to physical matter. Philippians 2 reminds us of this.

Jesus did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

[22 : 36] That's how much this world matters to God. In fact, there's an indication that Jesus, in his humiliation in his life on this earth, at times was worse off, even than animals.

Jesus says this in Matthew chapter 8. Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.

Those are just a few things. That we learn as creation takes part in the longing for God making everything right.

And that is what this passage, by the way, is primarily about. We're going to lose the plot a little bit if we make it entirely about the earth, because Paul is bringing this up to strengthen his argument from verse 18.

Remember verse 18, he's saying, the sufferings of this present age are not worth comparing to the future. And so you need to set your eyes on that, fix your eyes on that, long for that.

[23 : 46] And so the final point that Paul's getting at indirectly is this. Don't let the created world outdo you in longing for heaven.

Don't let the trees be more excited for heaven than you are. If this world is on its tiptoes, stretching out its neck, looking for Jesus' return, how much more should we?

It would be odd. It would be sad if the rocks could see more clearly than us.

And so once again, we're to set our eyes on Christ and the glorious future to come.

Verses 19 through 22 are really just repeating, supporting verse 18. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

[25 : 02] glory so great that the world can't wait. There's a famous story told by a man named Joe Stoll, who was one time the president of Moody Bible Institute.

And Joe had a friend named Bud Wood, and Bud Wood ran the Shepherd's Home in the 1960s, which was a place for children with a variety of challenges. And at one point, Bud asked his friend Joe, he said, what do you think our biggest maintenance challenge is?

As we're running this facility, what is it that trips us up the most? And Joe said, well, I have no idea what your biggest maintenance challenge is. So Bud went on to tell him, he said, our greatest challenge, the thing that we have to work the hardest against, is dirty windows.

Our kids press their hands and faces against the windows because they're looking to the sky. to see if today might be the day that Jesus will return for them and take them to his home where they will be healed and complete.

Don't miss the point. Don't lose the plot. nature knows what matters. How much more should we?

[26 : 32] Are you looking for Jesus' return? Are you stretching out your neck? Are you on your tiptoes? Do you long for heaven?

It is more glorious than you can imagine. Let's pray.

Our Father in heaven, we thank you that you have prepared for us an inheritance that is unfading, undefiled, imperishable, kept safe in heaven for us.

We ask that you would remind us of that, you'd set our eyes on it, that it would be our north star, that we would walk through this life knowing our destination, that our hope for the future would inform our present.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.