

True Hope

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[0 : 00] With verses 23 and 25. So if you have a Bible or you can open your bulletin and turn with me to Romans chapter 8.!

Romans 8, 23 to 25. Romans 8, 23 to 25.

Let's pray. Lord, we're thankful for your word. We pray that you might use it to work in our hearts to see Jesus more clearly.

And Father, that we would lift those hearts up in praise to you. And we ask this in Christ's name. Amen. I'm glad to be with you this morning. I just got back from a week with my family, with our extended family in North Carolina.

And it was a good time of reconnecting and doing things that you do in a larger family gathering. You might do some of these yourself. Eating everything fried.

[1 : 30] Drinking tons of Sundrop, which is just sugary, sugary drinks. Catching fish. Swimming through humidity and navigating through pollen and all that.

But most importantly, at this time of year, if you're from North Carolina, you watch college basketball. That's really important.

And for those of you that are unacquainted and lump every sport into this generic sports ball category that you don't care about, stay with me for a minute. Okay? It's that time where you fill out those office brackets.

You maybe let your kids stay up late. Maybe even miss school. Not saying that happened in our house. And there you find yourself in the joy of victory and the agony of defeat.

You might even utter the phrase, I really hope my team wins. Let me remind you that in hoping that your team wins and hoping, impending all your hopes on the athleticism of teenagers, because that's what they are, that we enter into a game that has no hope, or that's what we think.

[2 : 41] In fact, the game with no hope at all is a reminder to us, not of just life, but of the 1992 version of March Madness. Now, some of you will know this game.

It contributed to the greatest sports villain of all time. And in this game, there's something called the shot. The one shot that is above all other shots.

It's Duke and Kentucky meet two perennial powers of college basketball, and they're tied throughout the whole game. And then they go into overtime, and Kentucky's up by one.

There's two seconds left. There's no hope. You can't even dribble the ball down the court the whole way. So what do they do? They throw the ball 80 feet.

A basketball court is 90 feet. So almost the whole thing. One guy catches the ball, bounces it once, turns and shoots, and it goes in. And they win.

[3 : 40] And they win the national championship. And Christian Laettner became the greatest villain of sports of all time. Now, some of you might actually agree with that statement, that he is the greatest sports villain of all time.

Now, in that moment, Duke fans are waiting, saying to themselves, I hope he makes it. And little Kentucky kids are sitting in front of their TV at home and saying, I sure hope he misses it.

And Laettner, for all of his past success, he didn't miss one shot that whole game. He's thinking, I really hope I make it. You see, leading up to that game, that same exact play had happened earlier in the season.

And if you know sports history, he misses it. In fact, he doesn't even catch the ball. So he can't even depend upon his own past success, even though he's not missed a shot the entire game.

He's hoping. But he's not the only one that hopes. I hope. You hope. We all hope. And it might not be basketball or sports ball generally.

[4 : 53] You might not hope your team wins. You might not be glued to the television this month. But you hope other things. You hope tomorrow that your presentation goes well.

You hope mortgage rates drop again. You hope that war ends soon. You hope that you'll have enough money at the end of the month because you've overspent.

You might hope that there's still snow left this season. You might hope that summer comes more quickly than it should. You might hope that you get married. You might hope that one day you would have children or grandchildren.

You might hope that you would save enough money to retire. Unless, kids, you think it's just adults that hope. What about this?

I hope I remembered my homework today. I hope my mom and dad don't forget to pick me up on the way home from school or way home from work. And I get left at school.

[5 : 53] So whether it's little things or big things, we still hope. We hope that our marriages will get better. We hope that one day we'll be married.

We hope that we won't struggle with sin like we do now when we get older. I hope that someone remembers me when I die. Hope often communicates to us what's most important in our own hearts.

But in fact, everything I just said could also be us worrying. That's the interesting thing. But the hope of Christian Laettner, the hope of our own hearts, is that the hope that Paul's talking to us about this morning?

Is that the hope that God communicates to us? It's a little bit different if we think about it. Because there's an aspect of certainty. Christian Laettner doesn't know if that shot's going in.

You don't know if you're going to get married. You don't know if you're going to be rich or wise. You don't know if you're going to walk out of here and die. But there is certainty in the hope that God shows us this morning from Romans 8.

[7 : 03] In fact, hope is essential to salvation, is what Paul says. It's a pretty big deal. If it's that big of a deal, it's worthy of our attention. So this morning, we're going to look at two aspects of it.

Kind of two headings. It's groaning, which we talked about last week, and then hope itself. So hope under those two headings. Groaning and hope itself. First, let's turn our attention to the groaning.

If you look back with me at these short verses, you'll notice that that groaning that we talked about in all creation, the groaning continues. It starts exactly where Matthew left off last week.

And it's not just us that's in view at CMPC or people in the modern day. It's all people of all time and everywhere. Because this groaning is a cosmic issue.

It's not just an issue of hoping first, and then the groaning kind of is just something that happens along afterwards. The groaning is like essential to this.

[8 : 04] It's wrestling because everything is not right as it should be. And all of it, all of creation participates in this.

But it doesn't stop there. It's not just out there creation. It groans. There's groaning inside of us as humans. Because we're the crown of all creation, right?

We're mankind. And Paul, like Jesus, argues from lesser to greater things. Creation, even in all of its manifold witness to God's glory, is not as great as humankind.

Because we are made in God's image. And so if creation groans, man, humanity is groaning as well. John Piper famously calls this groaning creation and groaning Christians.

Which I think is pretty clever. Because oftentimes we don't think that we can groan. We think Christianity doesn't have this element of wrestling and struggling with stuff. That everything's just a-okay, right?

[9 : 06] All the time. But that's not the view that we get here. The groaning is part of who you are. But what's all the groaning about, really?

Is it complaining? Is it hating this world? Is it something different? I think I've said this before in our march through Romans. Is it being so heavenly-minded about what's to come that you're of no earthly good?

That wouldn't cause you to groan, would it? Because you wouldn't care about this earth. It's, again, this longing for things to be made right. Something is wrong with this world.

I can't put my finger on it. Or maybe I can, but I don't know what the solution, or I can't affect a solution to this. Because the solution has yet to come.

There's a kid's book that describes it this way. That God, we're waiting until God and his children are together again. No more running away or hiding. No more crying or being lonely or afraid.

[10:08] No more sick or dying. Because all those things are gone. Yes, they're gone forever. However, everything sad has come untrue. That, friends, is why Christians groan.

Because the sadness still remains. The darkness still remains. The loneliness still remains. Because that day has not yet come.

And that should give us encouragement. The really fancy term for this is the already and not yet. Matthew's made reference to it before when we talk about wrestling with sin.

But this aspect, and it's all throughout Paul. Or the \$10 word. Is inaugurated eschatology. I don't even want to say that again. But the already and not yet.

Right? There's something that's coming. And there's something that's already happened. The not yet. That day when all things are made right.

[11:07] Has not yet happened. Okay, so what about the already? What's going on now? Now, there's a difference between hoping that that basketball shot will go in. And the hope that is in this passage.

And that's the certainty. Creation wouldn't be groaning or complaining if they didn't know what would happen in the future. So we can use a bunch of different terms for this.

The coming of the new heavens and new earth. The consummation. Heaven generally. Whatever term you want to use, it's not here yet. There's aspects of us being Christians.

If you call upon the name of Christ. That not everything is settled yet. But it's also kind of a strange phrase if you think about it. Because we have, what does the text say?

The first fruits of the spirit. Now when Paul uses this phrase, he's calling forth from the Old Testament this idea of bringing that which is worthy into worship.

[12:08] In the Old Testament sacrificial system. We get something like that. But he says, not that it's a deposit telling us that surely this will happen. But he's calling forth this idea that the Holy Spirit is already at work in you.

And in that, we have surety that it will be accomplished. That it will succeed. And that assurance does a couple things for us as Christians. It reminds us that when we think about that struggle with sin that we talked about a few weeks ago.

That Paul got to the point when he cries out, oh wretched man that I am. That when we struggle with sin and we don't see victory immediately. We know that it's coming a day when we won't struggle with sin.

We know that there's a day coming when all things are made right. That the spirit will win. And the source of that groaning is because it hasn't happened yet.

We talked about the spirit being this deposit of something that will happen in the future. That's certainly true. But what's in view here is the spirit working and already making you more and more holy.

[13:26] That he's begun a good work in you and he's carrying it to completion. But it hasn't happened yet. And until then, we groan. Okay, that makes a whole bunch of sense.

But when we look at that back half of verse 23, it's really confusing. I thought that we were already adopted. I thought that we were already saved.

Wait, are we being saved in the future? It can get really confusing if we view this not through the lens of already and not yet. You see, it doesn't just apply to heaven.

It also applies to us. This tension between when we say that you're saved now. And we can say it with such certainty. And even use language like it's happened in the past, even though it will happen in the future.

You might even talk to a non-Christian friend and say, have you been saved? And if we're honest, it's really weird to talk like that. If you haven't had that reaction, just do it enough and somebody will say, save from what?

[14:31] I don't understand what you're talking about. And we should be mindful of that as we're sharing the gospel with our friends and neighbors. That kind of language can be really weird. But it's a present reality based on the certainty that something will happen in the future.

And that comes true even in salvation. And that's true even in adoption. Because we know it will happen. And so there's aspects of our adoption that are true now, but we'll experience more fully in the future.

We see this in all kinds of areas of life. Think about marriage. Even if you've never been married before, chances are you've known someone that's engaged to be married.

And when a man proposes to his bride, he might give her a ring as a reminder of the commitment that's to come. And when it's there, there's a sense in which the benefits of being married are already there.

Remember, the ring is not just for him. It's also to ward off all those other future boyfriends, right? And those suitors know that she's to be married.

[15:37] And there might even be groaning as the wedding planning goes on. But I could go on. But there's a sense in which the marriage is not truly, fully realized yet. There's an engagement to be married, but the benefits, the companionship, all of the intimacy has not yet been fully realized.

The same is true of salvation. The same is true of adoption. But right now, we're still waiting. And I'll admit, it's harder to wrap our minds around this idea for salvation or adoption than it is for heaven. We'd like to think that adoption is just in the here and now. But it's part of this larger logical flow when we talk about salvation. That there's aspects in which we don't feel truly as sons and daughters of the king yet.

But one day we will. And that's why Paul, he talked about adoption already. If you think back to verses 15 and 17 of Romans chapter 8. He can say, you have received the spirit of adoption. Something that's in the past. But now he's talking about it as a future event. There's a tension. The groaning that we feel. It's because it's ours, but it's not happened all yet.

[16:55] And as we do that, we recognize that the world is off. Matthew prayed earlier for the war in Iran. We can see something's not right there.

We don't want that. But it's not just out there. It's also inside of us. We sin. I don't want that to happen. I want that to go away.

We can see evil and things not being right. And if you joined us this morning and you've never put your faith in Jesus, I'm glad that you're here.

And God is not distant in all of these things. In fact, very much the opposite. He's meeting this evil and this personal aspect intimately in the form of his son.

Sending his son, God, and man to pay for sin for us. God is not just letting that happen and doing nothing about it. And then as we think about Easter that's coming next week, we know that we celebrate Christ's glorious resurrection from death.

[18:01] He's been raised from the dead and is coming again. But that coming again is where we find ourselves right now. Because we're waiting for it. In the time between him being raised and coming again, there's still an aspect in which things are not yet right.

And that tension is why we groan. But if we know the future is certain, how much more should that change us while we wait?

How much more should that mark us in our joys and sorrows? We recognize that things are not as they should be when our bodies don't work. But one day, they will.

When our relationships with family are broken, whether it's within our own family with our children or broader family, one day they'll be set right. When we go to work and it's frustrating and I can't just seem to get everybody on the same page and you feel like you're banging your head against the wall, one day it will work without any problems.

When nations oppress their people and they cry out and they just want a good king, one day that good king will come.

[19:18] When sin seems to have the upper hand in our lives and we just think to ourselves, I surely must not even be a Christian. I can't struggle like this. One day we won't struggle.

So what do we do in the meantime? We rejoice and we struggle as ones that have hope because of the certainty of the future.

If I'm honest, I struggle in this department. And I don't know if it's God's making me, but when I share the gospel with people that seem more joyful than me, I'm convicted even by people that don't know Christ.

But we, of all people, should know the joy that comes from the certainty of our future. And that should infuse everything that we're doing.

And so when we hold that forth to somebody, to our friends and neighbors, we hope that it changes them. We hope that they can see that. But there is a sense in which we're groaning.

[20 : 22] So groaning, but what about hope itself? Look with me at verses 24 and following. This is what Paul says about hope. Honestly, if we were talking about hope and we were of, you know, two, three hundred years ago, we might say something like hope.

The explanation, the definition, the application, the implications, all of that is wrapped up into what Paul says in these few verses. It's truly an expansion of the topic, though.

Because if you've been walking with us through Romans, this is not the first time that we've talked about hope. Remember, he's visiting a theme that he's already talked about. This is what he says in chapter 5. When he's explaining the inner workings of salvation, he touched on hope and he says this.

Through him we've also obtained access by faith into the grace in which we stand. We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. But not only that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance.

Endurance produces character and character produces hope. And hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

[21 : 40] This hope is future-oriented, but it has implications for right now. Paul says this in 24. For in this hope we are saved.

And we might read that and think, uh-oh, what's going on there? He's not saying that hope is the instrument by which you're saved. What's that? That's faith. He's saying that hope is so bound up in salvation that the whole house is going to collapse if you pull hope out of it.

Again, the rationale for this is the ongoing work of the Spirit. Other places, Paul called it a deposit. We talked about that. And the death of Christ as a demonstration of this love is all kind of swirling together.

In that way, Paul can say, in hope we are saved. It's not simply future salvation. Christian granted, Christian have been granted by God a sense of salvation now.

And we can be sure because of his promises. We can see all the weaknesses of this world and feel let down by all these people, but we know that God will deliver this for sure.

[22 : 54] Again, what he's not saying is hope is not the thing by which salvation is accomplished. In your life, that's faith. It's not the law as we saw earlier in Romans, that hope is just so bound up in it that salvation without hope is no salvation at all.

And he goes on to kind of explain that hope is not simply just seeing things as they are. It's something that's not seen. He asks this question, though.

For who hopes in what he sees? Because that's not hope at all. Look at verse 25. But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

So hope is not simply seeing things in front of you, but hope is also patient. He picks up on that idea that we heard in Romans 5, but it's not simply affirming what you see, but he introduces this new idea of patience.

There's a French theologian that said this about this, that hope ever draws patience with it. You can't have hope without patience. It's so integral that without patience, it's not hope at all, just like salvation is not salvation without hope at all.

[24 : 13] In spite of all these things, the groaning kind of continues because they're not as they should be. There's wrestling against sin. There's this world. But Christians wait with patience.

But why? Why? Because the certain common glory of the Lord Jesus Christ propels us through this life and makes us wait with patience.

There's a really famous theologian from the Carolinas that said this, if the church could be aroused to a deeper sense of the glory that awaits it, she would enter with a warmer spirit into the struggles before her.

So if they are so enamored with God's glory, it would change how we wait with patience. That's what Paul is saying to us. And that hope would inspire us to march on.

That's the picture that we have in Abraham as well. That Abraham, in spite of all his unfaithfulness and stupidity and him being knuckleheaded, he still trusts in God's promises.

[25 : 26] And that's why Paul uses him as an example. That we're to wait knowing that God will accomplish his promise. The same is true for Christians. And the same is true if we think about Palm Sunday.

What did they all do? They celebrated him as he entered into Jerusalem. Some of them thinking he was this king that was gonna come in and change all their political fortunes.

Right? Kick all the Romans out and everything was gonna be awesome. To lead the revolution.

Instead, he came as a king not just doing that but so much more.

He came to secure salvation from sin. The Romans are no small feat. But it's so much less than sin.

He came to give hope as they wait for redemption.

As we wait for redemption. As we wait for the coming glory of the kingdom. We do so groaning but we don't do so as those without hope.

[26 : 32] And we pray that he might increase our hope in our hearts now as we wait for that coming day. Marching as we groan and wait with hope.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your word reminding us to endure the present sufferings of this life and may we cling to your word and cling with hope knowing that you will accomplish your purposes that you have secured through Jesus Christ.

It's in his name that we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Please.