

How Christ is Saving the Planet

March 22, 2009 - Romans 8:18-25

All I wanted was a little peace and quiet. But instead I ended up groaning with frustration. I was at the Public Library. I go there for quiet reflection and study. In the very old days when I went to school, libraries were quiet. You went there to find books or read. People universally understood that you were supposed to be quiet in libraries so you wouldn't disturb other people.

But today things are different. The library has become a place of research, study and community. In some ways, this is a good development. It's nice to meet people and have fun at Libraries. But when you go there to concentrate, it can be frustrating when there's lots of noise. I am not blaming Library employees for noise or not cracking down; I don't know what sort of limitation they face. A few weeks ago, I went to the library to read. I first sat in an area where there were lots of tables. It must have been in January during High School exams. Lots of high schoolers dominated the tables engaging in so called "studying." I give many of them credit. They had their heads in their books. But they would also be texting, talking on their phones and whispering whenever anyone new came into that study

area. Eventually the whispers grew in crescendo to sound like a dull roar. I decided to move somewhere else.

I found another table in another section of the library. I had just gotten into my reading when all of a sudden I hear, "NO! NO! I don't want to!" Now for those of you who have visited the public library, you'll know they have a circular staircase made out of brick going up to the second level. It's very nice and makes for an interesting stairwell. It also serves as a perfect sound funnel up to the second floor. This cry, which I first thought came from a medieval torture chamber, came from an anguished toddler who did not want to put on their coat. The poor mother wanted to leave and the toddler didn't want to go. So it repeated this desperate cry over and over. "No, No, I don't want to," which echoed up all through the area I sat in. Finally, the mother got the child calmed down or successfully choked it into submission and momentary silence returned. . . .

. . . Until a few moments later. I heard this thumping and drumming sound. It wasn't light tapping. It was like I had stumbled onto a percussion practice of first year junior high band students in September. I looked for the source and saw a guy sitting at one of the

computers with headphones on. He was older than me and listening to some tune he loved. You know what happens when you have headphones on and you can't hear yourself? So he drummed and thumped and tapped along to this good ole rock 'n roll tune. By that time, I had given up hope that I would actually have quiet reading and tried to concentrate. But I am sure that during each episode of interruption, I uttered something that sounded like this . . . GROAN.

A groan is a “deep, wordless, prolonged sound expressing pain, grief, annoyance or disapproval.” People also groan to express stress or strain.” You know those macho guys at the fitness club who have to let everyone know that their benching 400 pounds. But do you know what I've noticed around Sturgeon Valley over the last few weeks – a lot of groaning. I've heard groaning, I've sensed it in e-mails and I've seen it on faces.

I don't think most of the groaning is related to the pain you're suffering from bench pressing 400 pounds. I think these are deep groans expressing the pain, grief and suffering of life right now. You don't have to look very hard to groan about life. Lori and I sat down to watch some news on Wednesday night.

First story: *Tragedy* – Natasha Richardson actress and wife of actor Liam Neeson dies from injuries sustained during a simple ski lesson at Mont Tremblant ski resort. Second story: *Disgust* – An Edmonton man is convicted of drunk driving for the 18th time. The only difference from the previous 17 convictions was that he seriously injured someone. He awaits sentencing. Third story: *Pain* – a trial begins in Montreal for a young man who went ballistic when a girl tried to intervene between him and his girlfriend. He allegedly beat this Good Samaritan so badly that she died. So both her family and his family begin the arduous journey through an emotional trial. Three stories of tragedy, disgust and pain led to our groaning. That was the end of our news watching. We have enough groaning around us we don't need to add the groaning of the whole world.

Will there be an end to our groaning? If we stop and consider the realities of life, will we often if not always groan? Then does life just become an attempt to mask our groanings or ignore them? Well friends, I'm here to tell you today that a time is coming when groaning will end for all Christians. When is this going to happen? **Groaning will end when glorification begins.** The groaning of Christians

will cease when something called glorification happens in our lives. And when glorification comes it will have a profound effect on creation.

Last week we started a mini-pre-Easter series on God's Easter message. The overall theme of this series is "God's Easter Message exposes the fatal flaw in save the planet plans but points us to the ultimate planet savior." Last week we looked at the fatal flaw. We discovered from Romans 3:9-20 that all humankind is guilty before God of sinning against His moral law. None of us can claim that we have given God glory everywhere and all time. Since all "save the planet" plans come from human beings with this fatal flaw, sin taints every plan. Some noble plans may show great concern for God's creation. But since sinners write and try to carry out or block these plans, they face huge insurmountable obstacles.

Today we get to meet the ultimate planet savior and how He is going to save the planet in another passage from Romans. After explaining the Gospel, the Apostle Paul in his letter talks about the Holy Spirit's role in the Christian life. He first explains that the Spirit gives Spiritual life and it is by the Spirit we put to death the sinful

nature in us. Then Paul explains that the Holy Spirit also enables us to call God "Father." He confirms in our hearts that we are children of God which greatly comforts Christians when we doubt our faith. Paul proclaims that we will share in the glory of Christ as heirs of God, as fellow heirs with Christ. But then he drops the bombshell that before we get to enjoy this glory, there will be suffering in this life. Paul's explanation that puts our present suffering into eternal context is where we find the promise that groaning will end when glorification begins. To investigate this we will use the 4 of the 5 W's and 1 H.

Who is groaning?

Why are they groaning?

What is Glorification?

When will it come?

How will all this help for today's groanings?

By the time you leave here today, you might still groan about life. But I hope it will be purposeful groaning from a new or refreshed perspective.

Romans 8:18-25 (NIV) – printed in the insert.

Future Glory

¹⁸I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. ²⁰For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

Groaning will end when Glorification begins.

Who is groaning?

Well in verse 22, Paul states “We know that the whole **creation** has been groaning. Creation refers to all non-human creation. Paul personifies creation and then attaches this act to creation. “Creation has been groaning.”

Then in verse 23, Paul states “not only so, but we ourselves (**Christians**) . . . groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons.” So the answer to the first question is quite simple. Both creation and Christians groan.

Why are they groaning?

Creation groans because it was subjected to frustration by God at the fall of man. This story starts in verse 19. “The creation

waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.” Paul again personifies creation. He paints the picture of one straining forward for an eagerly awaited event. One commentator describes the eager expectation this way: “Like a supporter’s club craning their necks forward to see whether their favorite son has crossed the finish line and their common celebration is assured, creation cranes its neck forward awaiting the revelation of the sons of God.”

What does “the revelation of the sons of God” mean? Because all Christians become sons or children of God at our conversion. But we experience suffering and weakness like all other people. People can’t tell we’re God’s children just by looking at us. But one day, our status will be revealed. It’s like creation is watching a play with a whole bunch of actors and actresses. Then after the final act, the curtain draws back to reveal the various actors transformed into their real characters or true identities. No longer will they be part of a nameless company of actors and actresses. They will be revealed for who they really are. Creation eagerly awaits the revelation when you can identify a Christian just by looking at them. How? We’ll get to that in a minute.

But the next question is why is creation eagerly awaiting the revelation of the sons of God? Verse 20 – “For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it.” Some translations say “creation was subjected to futility.” Futility is when an object fails to function as it’s supposed to like a piece of space equipment that malfunctions and now spins uselessly in space. Currently, creation is unable to achieve its ultimate purpose. It is frustrated because someone subjected it or decreed it would be subjected. Now this frustration was imposed not because creation did anything wrong. Notice it was “not by its own choice.” The one who subjected it decreed this frustration upon Creation.

Who did this? God. What proof do we have of that? Genesis 3:17-19: “*And to Adam he said, ‘Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, “You shall not eat of it,” cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the*

ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust and to dust you shall return.”

Man’s sin resulted in a curse on creation. God imposed the consequences of the fall onto creation as well as to man and the serpent. Instead of submitting to man, creation resists man. Labor was supposed to be a blessing for man. Working reflects the creative activity of God. But the object of man’s labor, the ground, is cursed and becomes a source of frustration. So here is the ultimate cause of frustration at your work place.

But notice verse 20 does not end on a hopeless note of futility. “For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the one who subjected it, IN HOPE, verse 21, that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.” So somehow, even in the curse upon creation there was hope.

We might find this hope in Genesis 3:15. When God curses the serpent, God declares, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; *he will crush your head* and you will strike his heel.” The offspring of the woman is Jesus. He

would crush the head of Satan at the cross. When Christ returns, He will inflict a mortal wound on Satan. In fact Romans 16:20 states – “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.” When that final crushing occurs, creation will be liberated. So the creation was subjected to this futility in hope that it would be one day liberated from its bondage; its frustration.”

All this brings us to verse 22 where we first learned about creation’s groaning. Now we can say with Paul “we know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.” So creation groans in its frustration and anticipation of release from this frustration. One commentator writes, “We live in a sighing, sobbing, suffering world. The whole creation groans and suffers pain like that of childbirth. Nature’s music is in the minor key. The earth is racked by cataclysm. The blight of death is on every living thing.” (John MacArthur).

But why do we Christians groan? Verse 23. ‘Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.’ We groan because we can taste a little of God’s future

kingdom. We have the Holy Spirit in us. He is like a deposit guaranteeing something greater to come. His presence in us reminds us that one day we will be free of all the sighing and frustration in this world. But we still have to bear suffering today. Yet we yearn or eagerly await the culmination of God’s plan when there will be no more tragedies or repulsive reports or emotional trials to hear about. We look forward to that time when there will be no more tears and frustration and exhaustion and groaning. That time will come when we experience the last phrase of verse 23 – the redemption of our bodies – our glorification.

What does glorification mean?

Glorification is the reuniting of soul and new bodies of dead believers and the instant transformation of Christians still living when the end comes. Our glorification occurs when God completes His work in the lives of Christians. Dead Christians from all time will be resurrected and given new flawless resurrection bodies. In First Corinthians 15:42-44, Paul describes the resurrection body awaiting all Christians. “*So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is*

raised in glory; it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.” Remember earlier when we wondered what we will look like at the revelation of the sons of God? This is it. We will have these glorious new bodies. That’s one of God’s children who perfectly reflect the glory of Christ. Christians alive at the end of time will be instantly transformed into Christ-likeness and given resurrection bodies. 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 describe that moment “Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable and we shall be changed.” That’s when glorification will happen.

This will be an unbelievable, unimaginable, immeasurable blessing. It will be worth more than all the gold in the world; it will be more precious than the most memorable vacation or happiest moments of our lives; it will be the moment when we are completely free from every hurt, hindrance, horror and limitation that has followed us through life.

When will this glorification occur and what will happen? When will we receive the redemption of our bodies? We will receive our resurrection bodies when Christ returns for His Second Coming.

Wayne Grudem writes “Glorification will happen when Christ returns and raises from the dead the bodies of all believers for all time who have died, and reunites them with their souls, and changes the bodies of all believers who remain alive, thereby giving all believers at the same time perfect resurrection bodies like his own. At the same time, the entire creation will be renewed as well. In this renewed creation, there will be no more thorns or thistles, no more floods or droughts, no more deserts or uninhabitable jungles, no more earthquakes or tornadoes, no more poisonous snakes, bees that sting or mushrooms that kill. There will be a productive earth, an earth that will blossom and produce food abundantly for our enjoyment.

(Grudem – 836). In other words, when Christ returns He fulfills the role of ultimate planet savior. Christians will be glorified and Creation released from its frustration. Groanings will end when glorification begins.

But how can this help for today’s groanings?

How can the Christian maintain hope for eternal life in the face of sufferings and death today?

Christians must press on in the grace, strength and word of the Lord. Romans 8 is full of encouragement describing ways we can keep going.

Recognize suffering is part of the process of glorification. (Romans 8:17). The verse just prior to our passage explains this. Romans 8:17. “Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, *if indeed we share in his sufferings*, in order that we may also share in his glory.”

All children in a human family are heirs of the father along with the oldest brother; believers are God’s heirs in and with Christ. But receiving the inheritance that comes to us in Christ involves sharing in His suffering. Participating in the glory of Christ then requires that we share in the sufferings of Christ today. The fact of suffering is the dark backdrop against which the glorious future promised to the Christian shines brightly.

One commentator writes “Suffering is part of the process (of sharing Christ’s death), itself a sign of the wasting away of the present

age which must precede and accompany the emergence of the new.” Once we recognize suffering is not the end. We can

Look beyond sufferings and recognize that the bitterness of them will not even compare to the glory to be revealed to/in us. (Romans 8:18)

That’s what Paul does in Romans 8:18. “*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*” Our most intense sufferings of this day are not on equal standing with the glory to be revealed.

It’s not intense suffering today and some glory compensation later. It is intense suffering today – not worthy of comparison to glory. The glory is immeasurably greater. Well, I guess it was worth it!

You know those teeter totters or see saws that you see in children’s parks. Well imagine taking all your sufferings and placing them on one side of the teeter totter. That side crashes to the ground. It might seem like nothing could come close to even lifting that side of the teeter totter up. But when Christ returns and we experience the redemption of our bodies, the glory to be revealed in us will be so weighty that it will fling our sufferings high in the sky. Paul wrote to

his friends in Corinth saying “this slight and momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.” (2 Cor. 4:17). Somehow Paul’s focus on the eternal glory sustained him through temporary suffering.

We can also bear with the sufferings of today if we **Look forward to our new resurrection bodies**. Romans 8:23 states “we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.” It is proper to anticipate those that will be imperishable, glorious, powerful and spiritual. One day any limitation we currently experience in our bodies will be swept away. That time is coming. Every day is one day closer to that time.

We can also bear up in today’s suffering if we **Trust the certain hope in which we were saved**. (8:24-25)

Verse 24 states “in this hope we were saved.” We were saved in hope. Our salvation is past tense. But we live in hope – waiting with assurance and anticipation for the culmination of God’s plan for us and creation. Many people and dreams will disappoint us in this world. But God will certainly come through.

Yet when suffering is intense, it can be very difficult to keep this perspective. We can conclude that it is futile, that God has forgotten us, that there is no way out. But God doesn’t just call us to focus on eternal glory, to persevere through sufferings. He helps us. He acts in our lives today to assist us in maintaining that hope. The rest of Romans 8 overflows with God’s help to sustain us in our suffering. Some of the most famous verses in the Bible follow our passage.

Lean on the Holy Spirit’s help in prayer (8:26-27).

Trust that God will work all things together for good. (8:28)

Rejoice that God continues to conform us to Christ likeness. (8:29)

Celebrate that God will complete His work of glorification in us. (8:30)

Rest in the reality that nothing can separate us from the love of God. (8:35-39). Even today’s groaning will end when glorification begins...

Not a Christian: Not all groaning will cease when glorification begins. For some groaning will continue for others it will start with a deep

intensity. When Christ returns, it'll be too late to trust Him as Savior.

It'll be too late to become a Christian.

Yes, the dead in Christ will be raised. But the dead apart from Christ will also be raised to face judgment. Please don't wait any longer to come to Christ. Put your personal trust in Christ and God will save you. You too can look forward to glorification and the end of your groaning.

I close today with a poem by John Piper called Glorified.

Glorified (original 1985)

By John Piper December 14, 2003

As far as any eye could see
 There was no green. But every tree
 Was cinder black, and all the ground
 Was grey with ash. The only sound
 Was arid wind, like spirits' ghosts,
 Gasping for some living hosts
 In which to dwell, as in the days
 Of evil men, before the blaze
 Of unimaginable fire
 Had made the earth a flaming pyre
 For God's omnipotent display
 Of holy rage. The dreadful Day
 Of God had come. The moon had turned
 To blood. The sun no longer burned
 Above, but, blazing with desire,
 Had flowed into a lake of fire.
 The seas and oceans were no more,
 And in their place a desert floor

Fell deep to meet the brazen skies,
 And silence conquered distant cries.

The Lord stood still above the air.
 His mighty arms were moist and bare.
 They hung, as weary, by his side
 Until the human blood had dried
 Upon the sword in his right hand.
 He stared across the blackened land
 That he had made, and where he died.
 His lips were tight, and deep inside,
 The mystery of sovereign will
 Gave leave, and it began to spill
 In tears upon his bloody sword
 For one last time.

And then the Lord
 Wiped every tear away and turned
 To see his bride. Her heart had yearned
 Four thousand years for this: His face
 Shone like the sun, and every trace
 Of wrath was gone. And in her bliss
 She heard the Master say, "Watch this:
 Come forth all goodness from the ground,
 Come forth and let the earth redound
 With joy." And as he spoke, the throne
 Of God came down to earth and shone
 Like golden crystal full of light,
 And banished once for all the night.
 And from the throne a stream began
 To flow and laugh, and as it ran,
 It made a river and a lake,
 And everywhere it flowed a wake
 Of grass broke on the banks and spread
 Like resurrection from the dead.

And in the twinkling of an eye
 The saints descended from the sky.

And as I knelt beside the brook
 To drink eternal life, I took
 A glance across the golden grass,
 And saw my dog, old Blackie, fast
 As she could come. She leaped the stream—
 Almost—and what a happy gleam
 Was in her eye.

I knelt to drink,
 And knew that I was on the brink
 Of endless joy. And everywhere
 I turned I saw a wonder there.
 A big man running on the lawn:
 That's old John Younge with both legs on.
 The blind can see a bird on wing,
 The dumb can lift his voice and sing.
 The diabetic eats at will,
 The coronary runs uphill.
 The lame can walk, the deaf can hear,
 The cancer-ridden bone is clear.
 Arthritic joints are lithe and free,
 And every pain has ceased to be.

And every sorrow deep within,
 And every trace of lingering sin
 Is gone. And all that's left is joy,
 And endless ages to employ
 The mind and heart to understand
 And love the sovereign Lord who planned
 That it should take eternity
 To lavish all his grace on me.

O God of wonder, God of might,
 Grant us some elevated sight,
 Of endless days. And let us see
 The joy of what is yet to be.
 And may your future make us free,
 And guard us by the hope that we,

(Within the light of candle four),
 Are glorified forevermore.

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