

The Hope of the Fallen Creation

Romans 8~19-22

Were you to walk into the room where a woman is in labor, you might not be able to tell the difference from that of a woman groaning as she approaches death. But what a world of difference! A person struggling to live while dying, and a person struggling through death in order to bring forth life.

This is so important to keep in mind as we come to our next section in the best chapter of the Bible. These are birth pangs, not death pangs.

Paul is focusing on our sure salvation. The *perfection* of salvation – new life and new relationship, is in the first 17 verses. The *past, deep foundation* of salvation is later in 29-30, and the *present and powerful nature* of salvation closes the chapter – nothing at all can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

But here, beginning in 18-27, is the *future* of salvation – the glory that is coming, against which the sufferings of the present are not worthy to be compared.

And the creation steps in right here to say, **AMEN!**

This is such a big, a broad and wide matter. Our guided tour today begins with the world looking like it is in death pangs, or

1. The Creation Described

In verse 19, the creation is found waiting eagerly. Notice how four times Paul rolls that word out – creation, creation, creation, creation.

This is describing that dominion of man which with him fell in Genesis 3.

This excludes believers who are part of creation but are added in verse 23. This excludes angels who enjoy right now the glory and vision of God. This excludes devils who tremble and fear rather than eagerly long for the redemption day of the Lord. And here is the worst exclusion of all: unsaved men and women. Mankind is the most confused about the earth and why we are here. They will not groan for that most evil of all evils – **SIN**, which separates them from God. Do sinful men groan within to be delivered from a fallen and futile world? No, they call this world home. This clay god is their life, their hope, their all in all. And though gravely disappointed over and over again, as their time runs out, they will not abandon their death-grip upon this present, dying world. Why? Because they will not abandon their sins.

This is the animate and inanimate world, the world under man. It is the sun above and the shining stars; the sky and air; the land and soil that brings forth weeds instead of crops; the trees which fail to reach their full potential; and the animals of the wild, as Shakespeare described them – ‘red in tooth and claw’, eating and being eaten.

The earth was not made to see ferocious cycles of seasons – turmoil of floods, storms, hurricanes, blizzards, hot blasts and droughts of summer. She looks awful in such garments so poorly suited for her goodness. Earthquakes and lightning are pictures of God’s wrath.

And see them personified here, as if they had a mouth, like Balaam’s donkey. This is what they would say, if the rocks cried out or the woods could speak, here is their testimony, their witness!

They speak of what they see behind them, from the fall, as well as what is before them. In verse 20 – this creation was subjected to futility in the past, not willingly. Again, does the creation have a will?

What is **futility**? A word used only rarely in the New Testament (3x) but 54 times in the OT Greek version. And it is found most often in the book that begins: “Vanity of vanities – all is vanity!”

In what sense is the creation under futility? It means that it is not living up to its potential. Why? Because of man. At the fall, divine and sovereign curses changed the world because of sin. Sin is a big deal! A world-rocking event! But see, it is not man but God who subjected the world to futility – IN HOPE!

Then notice the word “unwillingly”. That shows the world is not meant for this! Not intended for this purpose. God made the world for good, for the glory of God, to be a stage for the Lord’s majesty and power and wisdom and goodness. But it is used for evil.

Verse 21 furthers the ugly picture. Slavery, bondage to corruption, or that consists in decay. This world was made with an aim to serve a good mankind but was early plunged into this nightmare, from which it struggles to awake and be delivered.

Some in the ancient world believed the creation was a giant mistake, an abortion produced by rivalling gods. Today, the modern world says this is all the product of chance – a mysterious, profound and lucky big bang from billions of years ago!

So you have to choose: the world is broken, fallen, because of sin, stupid gods, or silly chance!

One more quick item is in verse 22: this condition is universal. Not a part of this world described here is exempted, but every part joins in a symphony of woe!

All are groaning and in pain together. All join in. And all join in until now, says Paul; and all join in until the now of 2020. And all will continue to join in until the Lord returns!

So while subjected to futility, this is not futile. The world does not end in futility. The birth of a child makes the labor pains worthwhile. And what baby is on the way? What does this passage say forcefully about the future?

This is our Second Point: **The Creation's Hope**

1. This is a baby that is not here yet as long as with Paul we say 'until now' in verse 22. This world is not freed from its labor, its bondage to corruption. It is yet under a curse. Sin, Satan, tribulation, are all here. But there is coming a *now* in the future when this will not be the case. What is going to happen?
2. Number 2. The sons of God enter their inheritance. Their glory is going to be revealed in 18-19. Your true identity will be unveiled, and what is hope today will be realized, will be seen and arrives, verse 20. We will enter our full all-glorious freedom as sons of God and with us, the creation, 21. Who does this? How does this come about?
3. In a word, God! Verse 20. The same God who subjected this creation, did so in hope, to this very end, to bring this creation through this dark valley and bring forth a city of light and life, and make all things new! This is why this is so certain! This is the great

purpose of God to do as he has done! Why is this world fallen and groaning? To bring forth this child, this new creation! Hope then conditions everything. *Hope conditioned the act of subjection and continues to condition the vanity and corruption imposed upon it.*”

John Murray

4. Fourthly, if the creation so eagerly awaits to what she was meant to be for godly sons, how much more the children of God themselves? That is the point picked up in verse 23. By God, by His Spirit, by His Son, all this present age is being drawn to this future event and goal. What looks futile, corrupt and hopeless when tied to the past, is meaningful, hopeful, and sure when we look up and look forward to seeing Jesus who has entered his rest, and is returning to gather all of his people.

So the world will have its own resurrection of sorts. She will be released into freedom. She will be redeemed. The world is said to be renewed in Acts 3.21 and in Matt. 19, the whole creation is said to be regenerated, to be born again!

Jesus aims at this goal, and nothing less. And so should you. This world will not be glorified before Jesus comes.

This world will enjoy its Sabbath rest. The early church believed when Jesus returned, a millennium period would begin where the world, under the savages of sin and Satan, would become what it had been originally, and following that period, become its final estate.

So, a couple of **applications** for us, briefly.

You should know why this world has such problems. “What’s wrong with the world today?” GK Chesterton replied: “Me, signed

Chesterton!” You know why this wonderful and good world seems to go wrong all the time. Why there is order and beauty right next to chaos and evil. You are not like those who are strangers to Christ, who do not know why they are here.

To not have God is to be a part of the weight of sin and the curse on the earth. The earth was made for the glory of God, and not for unbelief, pride, rebellion, ignorance, and love of self, under which the world is given to futility and groaning! Jonathan Edwards taught how this world unwilling to be the stage, the theater for man’s atrocious and devilish living! It’s not meant for riots, for robbery, for murder, for abortion, for racism, for sensuality, for drunkenness, for stealing, and so forth. He talks about how the ground doesn’t want to give you footing for such things, and the air doesn’t want to go into foul lungs to speak out blasphemy, and the sun doesn’t want to shine on man’s evil deeds.

What a blessing to be able to understand these things! Oh, pity the blind unbeliever! You are like Dr. Doolittle, who can hear in the groans of creation God’s purpose and future! Thomas Boston says all the world, the sun, stars, trees and plants have gone into mourning at the death of their master, Adam, slain by the greatest of all murderers, the devil. But you have been rescued, snatched from the fires!

What a great Savior you have in Jesus Christ. All things are in Him, under Him, for Him and to Him. And He is able to subdue all things unto himself. There is one NT book that is too frequently overlooked, which brings out this cosmic side – it is the book of Colossians.

What a great salvation is yours! The coming world is, in God's estimation, so far greater than everything this world has, that it was so worth it to him to allow his good creation to be subject to futility this way for 1000's of years, in order to bring out a new heavens and new earth for endless years, for eternity. The birth that is coming is so much above and beyond the labor pains of history.

This is God's purpose – present groaning is the introduction to heaven, to glory. Not only the world, but Christians groan within themselves in verse 23. Even the Holy Spirit groans – verse 26.

But this is not the end but the beginning. The glory that is coming and to be revealed in us is bigger than words! And you will see it! Where perfect righteousness and goodness dwells! You will see men and women fitted for such a world, and such a world fitted for such men and women! Praise the Lord!