

The Hope of God's Children

Romans 8:23

We saw last week the whole of creation looking forward to a day of release, a day of glory, a day of hope fulfilled.

In short, the whole world is waiting for the Christian's hope to be fulfilled! It is not we who wait on the world, but the world is waiting on us! Verse 19 – the revealing of the sons of God!

It is the most natural thing then for Paul now to turn from the creation's hope in our redemption, to our hope now and eagerly longing for our redemption!

But if we share in this same hope, we also share in present groaning and longing for what is coming.

We are going to camp here in 23-25 for a little while, like a pleasant place to rest our souls. Today we focus most on why we hope and what it is we hope for. We will explore hope itself more fully in 24. And finally how hope is like the gas in the tank for our persevering in the Christian life – 25.

There are three groanings then – the world groans, the Christian groans and the Spirit groans in prayer for us in verse 26.

Understand something – everything groans! The unbeliever and the believer alike. You believer, have been delivered from worst groans to the best. Unbelievers laugh and play here but groan forever. Christians groan here, but groan their last in this life, never to groan again!

What futile painful dark hopelessness have you been delivered from!
The blackness of darkness forever, says Jude.

Or flip this upside down – the unbeliever has all of his hopes here, in this poor, fallen and broken world. He groans to leave this life.

But a new heavens and a new earth await you in the arms of Jesus.
And wherever you meet a Christian – this is their road they are on and their destiny!

Let us begin with the **first of five points** to see the connection with the groaning but hopeful creation, eagerly waiting for the advent of the Sons of God when Jesus returns.

Who can miss the parallel between 23 and what precedes?

If the creation – this futile but hopeful work of God’s hands looks forward to the release of man, her masters; waiting at the door of the prison for them all to come out – how much more should those who are to be freed, long for and groan for such a day!

This world was made for man, not man for the world. The fall has buried man’s body and kingdom in a grave of mayhem.

If the creation longs for this rescue as our servants, so much more the heads of this house!

Twice Paul says, as with urgency and energy, we ourselves, we ourselves! We for whom the glory of an everlasting city of righteousness is made; we who have something more than what the creation has – a foretaste of that future world!

The groans of the creation are labor pains, we said last week. A baby is coming and all creation is yearning for that birth. But the Christian has this new and greater life within. The baby to be born is you! The adoption and redemption has begun!

So these groans, these sighs, they are characterized as spiritual.

We groan here in Romans 8 in the opposite direction of Romans 7. There we groaned to be delivered from the body of death; here we groan to be delivered to the body of life, of resurrection. There we groaned because of remaining sinfulness; here we groan in hope of coming sinlessness and redemption. There we groan because of the taste of sin still fouling our mouths; here, because we taste already the pure delights of things above.

This brings us to **the next phrase and our next point** – these groans are because we have the first-fruits of the Spirit.

It is not because of something lacking as much as something more; not something missing but something given that leads you to long for and await eagerly what is yet to be.

I hope you recognize the metaphor of first-fruits.

OT Israel had an early harvest of first fruits which were brought to the Lord and his temple, to confess and thank him for his handiwork, and especially as a guarantee of the later and larger harvest.

7 of the 9 times this phrase is used in the NT is found in Paul. Paul takes this picture and makes it his own; makes it your own!

He also uses a parallel metaphor – the down-payment, which is a commercial version of this farming picture.

The point is: You have a down payment and the first fruit of what is surely coming to you in full in the future. This is the guarantee, the certainty of these things being emphasized. You therefore must enter into your glory and rest because this rest and glory has already entered into you! You must have what the whole creation groans for until now. You must have this full harvest because the Holy Spirit himself guarantees this.

There is an interesting twist. In the OT, first-fruits were what the believer brought to God in the temple. In the NT, first-fruits are what God brings to you, his people, who are his temple!

And all of this is according to grace. This is the gift of God in his Son, Jesus Christ. In 1 Corinthians 15, Jesus is the first-fruit from the dead. He is the guarantee of the full harvest and by his Spirit, we are part of his resurrection kingdom.

Now it is here that we really need to put our thinking caps on.

The resurrection of Jesus and his giving the Holy Spirit to make everything new, is something that belongs in the future. Resurrection is at the end of the world, not in the middle. The Spirit again brooding over the depths of the new creation is at the end. But Paul says they have come in the present!

It is as though these first-fruits of Christ and His Spirit draw us to themselves from that future, from that coming fullness, from that sure and final glory, in which Jesus is our head. Your salvation comes from the risen Jesus not only as the Alpha, but here, as the Omega, the End, into which He has already entered.

This makes the certainty of these things all the more sure! Do you see that the greater and harder part has been done?

And in a few lines, Paul will remind us that this was God's purpose all along! Your place in eternity, your glorification has been purposed before the world was even made, or before sin entered the creation to make it groan!

Now, this future harvest is of a most public and personal sort, as we come **to our third point**: 'the adoption as sons'.

We have seen in Romans this two-step salvation; we are already saved, and we are to be saved. We are redeemed now, we shall see our bodies redeemed at the last day. We are the adopted children of God, heirs of God, joint-heirs with Jesus Himself! But here we await a future adoption!

John says much the same thing – “Behold, what manner of love the father has bestowed on us that we should be called the children of God. And we are!” But in the next breath – “It does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when Christ appears, we will be like him – because we will see him just as he is!” (1 John 3:1-2)

You are already born again; but you await the world being born again at the return of Jesus. He has breathed life into your soul; at the resurrection he will make all things new. You are a new creation of God; you will enjoy all things being made new when you see Jesus.

He will exercise that power he has already to subdue all things to himself – that power that is already rooted in you.

And it is especially the Father who will most personally and publically make you his own. You who were already his by calling and adoption; you who were already his by election and predestination from eternity; you will be shown and declared before all of the angels and heaven to be his children!

This second adoption had a parallel in Roman culture. There was first a legal transfer, followed later by entrance into the rights and privileges of a son or daughter. Adopted children were given a public and ceremonial honor at adulthood, when the father, before friends and family, clothed his new child in a white toga; and then, on that day, the privileges already his by will and gift, were entered into in full. For instance, a son by the name of Marcellus, on his adoption day, burst forth with: ‘Today, I really begin to live! I am born today!’

You are the heirs of God; you have the firstfruits of the Spirit; you groan for what has been begun in you to be completed at the day of Christ.

And here is **our 4th point** which has specially to do with our bodies!

Notice Paul doesn’t say, the *resurrection* of your body; nor merely, your *redemption*; but the redemption of your body. Why?

Remember the powerful word *redemption* speaks of liberation, of being freed from chains, from a prison, to be set free. You see that same use in verse 21 – the creation is in bondage, and when the sons of God are freed, so will the world.

But aren’t you redeemed already? What about Rom. 3.24? Yes, you are redeemed. And that means all of you.

But I think you will notice that when you are redeemed, when you are saved, your flesh does not start to glow like that Moses on the mount! Your resurrection, and so your full redemption comes at the last day, when that final trump is sounded.

You have a renewed spirit and body right now. Your soul, your spirit will be perfected the moment you breath your last (Heb. 12:23). And here in this verse, your body will be raised, reunited with your spirit, and perfected at the end. 1 Corinthians 15 says you are sown a natural body, and raised a spiritual body.

You must have a spiritual body to fit you for the new heavens and new earth. Flesh and blood cannot inherit that kingdom; nor could we abide the presence of holy angels, much less an infinitely holy God, without a perfect body and soul.

So see something of the nature of Christian salvation. The gospel takes aim not just at saving your soul, with no concern for your body. If that were the case, why would Jesus need to be like us in the flesh as well as having a true soul?

Many religions teach that salvation is about being saved from the world and from the body; from all matter.

But man has sinned and fallen in body and soul. Both body and soul will be judged at the last day for sin. All men apart from Christ will be raised in their bodies to shame and eternal contempt. (Daniel 12:2)

What a wretched, an awful reunion between sinful and damned souls with sinful and damned bodies on that day! The body will wish it had no soul and could just rot in the ground like an animal. And the soul will wish it had no body at all which so greatly tempted it to live for

the flesh! How self-hating will men be in eternity apart from Christ, the last Adam! They will wish they were never born!

But we have to think quite the opposite when redeemed bodies are raised up, freed from all sin, from all evil, from every impediment. Here is an awesome body fitted for a new world, a holy and good world. And that perfect body and soul are made for the glorious, eternal table fellowship of the Bridegroom and His Bride! How fearfully and wonderfully made will be our resurrection bodies!

Paul says elsewhere:

²⁰ *For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait (same word) for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;* ²¹ *who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.* (Phi 3:20-21)

This brings us **fifthly and lastly to our attitude in the meantime** – we groan with eager anticipation, longing for what is to be brought to us by Christ our merciful Savior.

Such a hope, such a prospect does not lead to laziness or ease until that day comes. Our groaning is directed forward and upward, in a high calling in Christ Jesus. Our time here will and must involve suffering, so we must ready ourselves. Don't presume, said an old writer; you are not yet in heaven; but don't despair, because you are on the way!

The same word we saw last week – looking for something with outstretched neck and anticipation – is repeated here.

This hope, this eager waiting, this groaning, is the fruit of your yet to be glory. As labor pains signify a coming baby, so hope, eagerly waiting, is evidence of what is coming but presently not seen. If you don't hope for heaven, you almost surely not going there! More on this next time.

Two things then as we **close**:

First, let us think more on what is coming than on what is behind. Paul urges us to forget those things that are behind, and press forward to our Savior. Let us be groaning for glory, standing on our tip-toes for these great things!

Secondly, have a proper and high view of your nature, both body and soul. Yes, the soul is more important than the body; but, the body is not a throw away. Paul challenged the Corinthians and us, given as they were to sexual immorality: *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body. (1Corinthians 6:19-20)*

May your lives – body and soul – be filled with Christ, with worship, with grace, and with obedience, on your way to heaven!

*Praise the Savior, ye who know Him!
Who can tell how much we owe Him?
Gladly let us render to Him
all we are and have.*

*Keep us, Lord, O keep us cleaving
to Thyself, and still believing,*

*till the hour of our receiving
promised joys with Thee.*

*Then we shall be where we would be,
then we shall be what we should be;
things that are not now, nor could be,
soon shall be our own.*