

The Difference Hope Makes

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End Times: And Then The End Will Come Series

Romans 8:18-27

I had the privilege a week and a half ago of being invited to participate in a wonderful meeting on faith and politics at Yale University. The meeting brought together politicians and theologians, religious leaders, and a couple of pastors like me to talk about the current state of affairs between politics and faith. It was an extremely stimulating time and I was very glad to be able to participate in those roundtable discussions and on panels for Yale students and faculty.

But while I was there I heard two very encouraging bits of news. There was a document issued recently by 138 leading Muslim scholars and clerics from every part of the Muslim world – from Morocco to Indonesia, involving Sudanese, Shiites, and Sufi scholars – titled *A Common Word*. It was a signed open letter by all of these top Muslim clerics and scholars reaching out to the Christian community across the world for the sake of reconciliation and peace with the Christian community.

And one of the most extraordinary things about this document that all of these Muslim scholars and clerics from across all Muslim traditions said was that we have a basis for peaceful coexistence with the Christian community based on the common foundation of Christianity and Islam. And the way they described the foundation of Islam was this – in the words of Jesus:

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We are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and we are to love our neighbor as ourselves.

They said that these two great commandments can form a foundation for a huge relationship between the two great religious communities in the world – the Christian community and the Muslim community. Many people are saying that this Muslim document may be the most important inter-faith document in the last 40 years since Vatican II.

Some people at Yale have put together a Christian response warmly communicating on behalf of the Christian community a desire for peace and reconciliation based on these two great commands. The response from the Christian community is going to be printed in a full-page ad in the New York Times. I was asked if I would sign this response and I said that I would be honored to sign it. They are planning a meeting of top Christian leaders and Muslim leaders sometime in the Spring. We can only pray that where politics has utterly failed and where sociology offers no answer, perhaps the two great

commandments of Jesus can build a bridge between our Christian community and the worldwide Muslim community.

And then there was another very encouraging development in the last week and a half. The UN Secretary General just met with top evangelical leaders in Washington. Now, this is historic in and of itself because a generation ago evangelicals suspected that the UN Secretary General might be the anti-Christ. And now there is this meeting in Washington between the head of the UN and the head of evangelical churches and agencies across America. And guess what? The new Secretary General of the UN is himself an evangelical Christian. His name is Ban Ki-Moon. He is a South Korean and he said to this assembly that the world is looking to the Christian community for global leadership on a range of issues from human trafficking and torture to the Darfur and global warming. The Christian leaders present in Washington warmly accepted the challenge of leadership.

Two extraordinary bits of news in the last two weeks. Of course, you probably didn't hear about either one of them. They are not nearly as important as Ellen Degeneres' dog custody issue, or Brittany Spears custody issues with her two children, or Marie Osmond fainting on Dancing With The Stars.

The positive signs that I mentioned just a moment ago – this letter from the Muslim clerics and the Christian community's response with a planned future meeting; these positive signs might prove to be false hopes; maybe nothing more than another letter and another meeting that accomplishes absolutely nothing – like all the previous Mideast Peace Conferences, the bright hope from this recent opening might prove to be an illusion. And maybe Christian leadership at the United Nations might not produce anything more than anyone else's leadership.

Yet, we hope.

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Our need for hope

There is an old saying that while there is life, there is hope. But as one writer put it, the deeper truth is that while there is hope, there is life. Take away hope, and you take away life. Life without hope is reduced to mere existence – bleak, drab, there is no hope; life is burdensome. It is just survival. We human beings only live; I mean really live, when we have hope; when we can picture a bright future.

And hope is not just a decision that we make. Hope is not just a choice. It is the way we're wired. When we hope, we are full of energy; we are full of excitement. A few of us feel the need to look forward to something that is positive. Every human being dreams of better things to come.

In fact, it is the loss of hope that fuels so much rage in our cities. It is the loss of hope that is often at the foundation of so much substance abuse and domestic violence. I think it is the loss of hope that is really at the foundation of mid-life crises. When people get to middle age, they often look at their lives and say either they've accomplished some of the goals they set out to accomplish when they were younger, or they didn't accomplish those things. But in either case, they begin to feel that there is nothing else to really look forward to other than slow decline and death.

I know I am putting it in really stark terms, but at the bottom of midlife crises is hopelessness. What middle aged people do when they don't have anything to look forward to is what everyone around the world does when they don't have anything to look forward to and that is middle aged people try to escape? I know what I need to give me a fresh lease on life - a little red sports car. When the prospect of something good coming into your life is gone, maybe you have to decide to have an affair, or you sport a really great tan in Ohio in the winter. Or you see men frosting the tips of their hair – that is my age group's equivalent of the last generation's gold chains and chest hair showing. Now we frost the tips of our hair or we get a toupee. Or we get parts of our bodies nipped and tucked and suctioned and frozen and enhanced.

Hope is at the foundation of life. Hope is at the foundation of marriage. Hope is the way that we human beings get through difficult things. The loss of a job, a painful marriage, romantic breakups, a severely disabled child, failure of ministry – it is hope that carries us forward. Hope is the way we human beings live and not simply survive. I am starting a new series today on the end times. I'm calling the series "And Then The End Will Come." I want to begin by talking about hope. I've called today's talk, "The Difference That Hope Makes." Let's pray.

SLIDE – Romans 8:18-27

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

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

26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless

groans. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

Paul is giving us in this passage the secret of finding joy in your Christian life. How can you, no matter what you go through, no matter what one of your loved ones goes through, how can you possibly keep your joy and continue to dream of better things to come? How can you keep your hope? Here is what we read in v. 18:

SLIDE – Romans 8:18

18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

The words “I consider” is a translation of the Greek word:

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logizomai = I consider

It is where we get the word “logic” from.

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The logic of the gospel

The apostle Paul is saying: I have spent the last 8 chapters of the book of Romans working out the logic of the gospel. What God has done to rescue and restore all of creation. I've deeply thought about; I've worked through the implications of God's activity in and through his Son Jesus Christ. I've considered it. I've added it up. Logizomai is actually a bookkeeping term. It is what an accountant does when they've added up and balanced everything out. Paul is saying: Here is the bottom line. What God has set in motion through his Son Jesus Christ is the answer for everything that you have gone through in your life. What God has set in motion in and through Jesus Christ is the answer for what you are currently going through. And what God has set in motion in and through Jesus Christ is the answer for what you ever will go through. Here is the bottom line, Paul says. What God has set in motion through the gospel so changes the rules of the game, that nothing – no pain that you experience, no grief, no heartache, no pain a loved one experiences, nothing that you go through, nothing the world goes through can ever be seen the same way again.

So he says in v. 18 these words:

SLIDE – Romans 8:18

18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

This verse is very similar to a statement the apostle Paul makes in another letter in 2 Cor. 4:17 where he writes this:

SLIDE – 2 Cor. 4:17

For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

What the apostle Paul is saying is that when I weigh on a scale my present sufferings, or my loved ones' present sufferings, or even this world's present sufferings, even though they seem so unbearable, so heavy, so overwhelming, nevertheless, compared to the eternal weight of glory that will be revealed in us, these sufferings are light and momentary. They aren't light in themselves. They are heavy in themselves. They are horrible in themselves. But they only become light in comparison to something much weightier – the glory that you or your loved ones, or this world is going to experience.

We must never think about suffering in isolation. We Christians must always compare it with the glory to be revealed.

Do you ever think this way or allow God's future, God's kingdom to impact your mood right now? Do you ever say to yourself: Yes, I am going through a terrible time right now. We are going through a terrible time right now. But this season, this year, this decade, this is a blink of an eye compared to eternity and this suffering is like a grain of sand on the scale compared to the weight of glory that is going to shine through me, that's going to shine through my family, that's going to shine through this universe.

Again, it doesn't mean that the present circumstances don't hurt a lot. It doesn't mean that you don't shed real tears or experience real grief right now. But our knowledge of the future sets our tears and our grief in a context of enormous hope. Let me explain what I mean.

Let's say that you are going through a difficult patch with one of your children right now. Maybe you are encountering incredible teenage rebellion. The relationship with your child is very strained. They are lying to you and they are using drugs. They are sexually active. Maybe your child has gotten involved with a really bad crowd. They've gone off in a bad direction. But if you knew that this was just a season that your child would turn fully to Christ, that your child would turn out to live for Jesus and to love Jesus with all their hearts when they got to adulthood, it would be a lot easier to go through your present time with peace and with joy.

Maybe you discover a weird lump or growth. Maybe the doctor has discovered a tumor in your breast or your uterus. You are going in for some tests. If you knew that it was all going to work out; if you knew the results of the test ahead of time,

that it was going to be nothing, wouldn't you be able to experience peace and joy right now?

The stock market might crash. It crashed before. Investors could start leaping out of Wall Street windows, if they could get them open. What if you knew that the stock market not only would rebound, but double or triple in the next three years; that the economic downturn was just temporary.

See, this is Paul's argument. That the present suffering can be endured, more than endured, it can be triumphed over when you have the end in view, when you know what's coming, when you have hope.

How big is our hope?

So, let's work this out. How big is the scope of God's rescue operation in Christ?

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The scope of our salvation

SLIDE – Romans 8:19-22

The creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

Three times the apostle Paul mentions the creation.

SLIDE – Romans 8:19

The creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.

SLIDE – Ro 8:20

20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope

SLIDE – Romans 8:21

21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

And in v. 22, the apostle Paul mentions the whole creation:

SLIDE – Romans 8:22

22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

You know, it is not often that we hear Christians express the gospel message in terms of what it means for the whole creation, the whole universe and everything in it – every tree, every plant, every bug, every rock, every hill, every animal and fish, star and planet – the whole of our lives; not just our souls, but our bodies, our relationships, our marriages, our families, our work, our house, our gardens, our home decorations, our minds – all of creation, Paul says, is going to experience salvation. It is only this enormously big gospel, a gospel that involves restoring and rescuing everything everywhere that can give you hope when you are going through a difficult time.

By way of contrast, if your gospel only relates to individuals and even there, it is shrunk down to just the salvation of individual souls, if you have a shrunken gospel, it is no wonder that your gospel doesn't offer you much hope or comfort when you go through hard times.

When I was at Yale a week and a half ago, one of the best-known Christian lobbyists in America was there. You see this man on talk shows; he's been on Larry King; and has been interviewed by Katie Couric. He has frequent meetings with the President. This man sat across from me at one of the roundtables. Someone asked him, "How would you explain the gospel?"

He said, "The gospel is this – human beings have sinned, but God sent his Son Jesus into the world to die for sinners. And if we accept Jesus into our hearts, we will one day live forever in heaven with God."

Now, that is a popular explanation of the gospel. But when I heard this famous Christian describe the gospel like that, my jaw dropped and I thought, "That's it? Is the entire gospel summed up just by accepting Jesus into your heart and you will live with God forever in heaven?" That's certainly part of the message. We individuals need to accept what Christ has done for us. We individuals must enter a personal relationship with Jesus. But that's not the totality of the message. I thought why are we having this discussion about politics then? Why do we spend any time talking about anything other than accepting Jesus into your heart?"

If the gospel doesn't cover the entire universe, then why do we Christians try to feed hungry people, or bring clean water to African villages? Why is this church involved in AIDS projects in Zambia? Why are we building a community center in the Sudan? Why have we given earthquake relief to people who have suffered in Morocco? Why are there so many folks in our church working to improve our schools? Why do we have medical researchers in our church who are working to find cures for various diseases? Why try to do a good honest job of selling houses or selling cars, or home repair, or counseling? Why do anything at all other than tell people that they need to accept Jesus into their hearts? Is everything else irrelevant?

But Paul says that's not the whole gospel. What this Christian lobbyist expressed is a shrunk gospel; it is an anemic gospel. The gospel involves the entire creation. That's the reason why creation is waiting in eager expectation is found in v. 19,

SLIDE – Romans 8:19

The creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.

The reason that creation is literally standing on it's tiptoes; creation is straining forward like a dog on a leash is because creation knows that God has put in motion a rescue operation through his Son Jesus Christ that will affect everything. God has acted in accordance with his promises in the Old Testament and he is going about healing the entire broken world. He is putting all the broken pieces back together. He is taking this Humpty Dumpty world and he is putting it back up on the wall again.

What's the world waiting for? It is waiting for the revealing of God's glorious human agents who will be put back in loving authority over the world. The apostle Paul says this in v. 20,

SLIDE – Romans 8:20

For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope

Creation – the planet, the animals on the planet, the universe itself was subjected to frustration – literally futility, to meaninglessness, brokenness, not by its own choice. Creation wasn't judged because of something creation did. But rather, creation was judged by something we did. The idea, going back to the beginning of the Bible, back to the first chapter of Genesis, is that God created us men and women to be the vice-regents, to be the rulers over all of creation under God. God made us men and women to exercise loving, caring, thoughtful oversight over everything else in the universe.

But when we human beings rebelled against God, our rule over our planet got twisted and everything on earth got out of joint. Not only did our sin affect us, but because we were overseeing creation for God, creation itself was judged. We read in Gen. 3 that the ground then began to produce thorns. If you want to know the reason for droughts, floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, tsunamis and fires that are sweeping California – all of these things came upon our planet as a result of our human rebellion.

The answer to our environmental crisis is not as some New Age advocates would put it, to get rid of human beings. That, by the way, is actually being suggested by some very bright people. I listened to a prominent philosopher argue that the best thing that could ever happen for planet earth is that we institute a program of sterilization for every human being. He called it a kind of reverse evolution. And

in a century or so, when every human being on earth has died and there are no more people, then the planet will finally be able to rest. The answer is to remove us from the scene, some argue.

But Paul says the answer is not to remove human beings from the scene. The answer for creation is to redeem human beings. We human beings need to be restored to God's original purpose for us; for us finally to take our place on planet earth as God's image bearers – not distorted image bearers, but healed image bearers representing God's wise and loving rule wherever we go. And this plan to change us, to restore us, was begun in Jesus Christ. Jesus perfectly bore the image of God. He is the image of the invisible God. He perfectly represented God's rule and reign wherever he went. He was a signpost of our future by becoming the first human being to be resurrected from the dead.

Now, we are waiting to be resurrected ourselves and to be put back in charge of creation under God's loving care. Then, and only then, will creation be set free. There is a new day dawning and creation can feel the rays of the sun already breaking through because they've broken through in the first coming of Christ. Creation is straining at the leash. It is eagerly awaiting the day when Jesus returns, when he resurrects his sons and daughters, when he brings us back into our original condition. And then the whole planet will be set free.

And according to the words in v . 21,

SLIDE – Romans 8:21

that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

We will be brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

See, brothers and sisters, our eternal future is not going to be spent as disembodied souls floating up in heaven somewhere. Heaven, according to the Bible, is just an intermediate resting place for saved people until Jesus returns. Our eternal future is going to be spent in bodies, in new resurrection bodies. And our new resurrection bodies will live on a new earth, a renewed earth, a renovated earth, a restored planet in which everything is put back in its place. That is why Isaiah the prophet was so excited about 27 centuries ago when the Holy Spirit inspired him to say:

SLIDE – Isaiah 35:1-6

The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, 2 it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the Lord, the splendor of our God. 3 Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; 4 say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance;

with divine retribution he will come to save you.” 5 Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. 6 Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.

We are going to be set free. We’re going to have new resurrection bodies. We’re going to live on a planet that is perfectly restored. We’re going to be in eternal, loving relationship with the Triune God and with each other and with all of creation. We are going one day to see the face of our Lord. Do you understand why the apostle Paul, therefore, said in v. 18,

SLIDE – Romans 8:18

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

Do you think of these things ever? Is this your hope? Is this the future you are looking forward to? Are you filled with hope for the future that awaits for your loved ones? For the planet? Do you let the future impact your moods and your emotions right now? Do you work out the implications of all of this for yourself and for your present situation? The Christian hope is not some petty hope for a job promotion, - our hopes are not the petty hopes of this year’s present election. We are hoping in nothing less than the restoration of the universe. We are looking forward to the salvation of the universe! That is our future hope when Christ returns.

Well, what about the meantime? Between the time God set in motion his plan to restore and heal everything in the first coming of Jesus and the time when Jesus returns and brings that plan to completion, how do we live right now? What are we supposed to do between the first and second coming of Christ until we get home?

I would like you to picture a baseball diamond with four bases. Until we get home, the apostle Paul says here is the way we are to live in the meantime.

SLIDE – Romans 8:22-27

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? 25 But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. 26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.

Here is first base: First base we could call “groaning.”

SLIDE

We groan

Now in the meantime, between the first and second comings of Christ, is a time of groaning. V. 22, we read:

SLIDE – Romans 8:22-23

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

SLIDE – Romans 8:26

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.

Creation groans, we groan, the Holy Spirit groans – now is a time of groaning. Creation is now groaning, v. 22.

SLIDE – Romans 8:22

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

Paul compares the present state of creation to the pains of childbirth. He reminds us of the curse that was issued by God when our first parents rebelled. The ground was cursed; men’s work was cursed; and even women’s childbearing was cursed.

SLIDE – Genesis 3:16

To the woman he said, “I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with pain you will give birth to children.

I remember when my first child, Daniel, was born. Back then you didn’t have a private room; there was just a curtain between us and the couple next to us who were also giving birth. Marlene was lying in bed and she was just beginning to be in labor. But the woman next to us was shrieking and cursing and screaming. She called her husband every name in the book. I thought, “O my goodness, am I in trouble. That’s what’s going to happen to me in just a few hours.” She kept yelling and carrying on. And then Marlene’s labor increased and I was her Lamaze coach so I breathed along with her. We blew and puffed. I gave her ice chips. By the grace of God, she didn’t scream at me, or call me names. In fact, we had the baby a few hours before this other couple. The next day I was standing at the nursery looking in on my newborn son and the dad from the other

side of the sheet was staring at his son. I asked him how things were going. He said they were going great. I said, "You know, one thing that really helped us was doing Lamaze, practicing the breathing exercises. It really made a difference." He said, "I know. We were doing Lamaze the whole time."

That woman's labor is a picture of planet earth right now. There is this pain and groaning as you see the planet writhing like a woman in childbirth. When you hear about earthquakes, floods, or environmental catastrophes, the planet is writhing. But because of what God has done in Jesus Christ, the groaning of creation is transformed into labor pains for the birth of a child. Creation is not currently groaning in despair. What we are witnessing is not the groaning of a dying planet revolving around a dying star. Right now, we witness the groaning of an expectant mother, the baby is coming; the baby is coming; the new creation is about to be born; a new day is dawning! Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Creator, is returning to planet earth. He is bringing with him a new creation, a new world, a renewed world.

Not only does creation groan, but we groan. V. 23,

SLIDE – Romans 8:23

Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

Why do we groan? Because even though we are God's children now, through our faith in Jesus we are, right now, as it were, we are only half saved. What the Holy Spirit has done inside of you, if you are a person who has at some point in your life turned in faith to Christ, and reached out for Jesus and said to Jesus, "Jesus save me," what the Holy Spirit does is he comes into your life as a down payment, a pledge, of more to come.

But we don't have the full package now. Our salvation is not yet complete. We share creation's frustration and pain. Our bodies, the apostle Paul says, have not yet been fully redeemed. We don't yet have our resurrection bodies, so we groan often in bodily pain – the pain of infertility, the pain of a frozen shoulder, or a migraine, or going through chemotherapy, the pain of impacted wisdom teeth, and fibromyalgia and being a paraplegic. Right now, we groan bodily. That's what the Bible tells us is our lives in the meantime.

And we groan not only bodily, but we groan because our inward natures have not yet been fully restored. Have you ever groaned not because of your physical weakness, but because of the moral weakness of your sinful nature? Have you ever groaned because you said to yourself, "How could I have been so insensitive and so blind to the hurt I was causing?" Have you ever groaned inwardly with the stabbing thoughts of the pain you caused someone that you love? How could I have been so stupid? Have you ever groaned not because your body, but because of your moral weakness? You did again what you swore

you would stop doing. You haven't done what you swore you would do. You did what makes you ashamed; what breaks you down. We groan because we are half saved.

We groan because we long to be fully saved. Do you ever find yourself groaning over your sin asking yourself, "When will this stop? When will I stop?" Or perhaps your groaning is over someone else, someone you love. You groan for a son or a daughter who's making dreadful choices in their lives. You groan for a parent who is dimming out as the result of Alzheimer's. You groan for a world in which one billion people live every day in grinding poverty.

And you say, "Where is God in all of this? What is God up to while we groan and our planet groans?"

Here is the most amazing statement in v. 26,

SLIDE – Romans 8:26

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.

Nowhere outside of Christianity could you ever have a statement like what Paul says in Romans 8:26. God groans with his creation. God, who revealed himself in Jesus, is so near to us that he suffers with us. Where is God when we hurt? He is nearer to us like a loving mother. So near that like a loving mother, God hurts with us. Where is God when this planet hurts? He is so close, he is so intimate that he suffers; he aches with every assault, with every death, with every disappointment, with every broken relationship. God himself groans. The Spirit groans over this planet. When we cry, God cries. When we hurt, God hurts. When we groan, God groans.

What do we do in the meantime? We groan.

Here is second base...

SLIDE

We wait

vv. 23 and 25,

SLIDE – Romans 8:23

Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

SLIDE – Romans 8:25

But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

We wait eagerly and we wait patiently. Now is a waiting time. This is second base and this is the one thing that we 21st century people don't want to hear anything about. Wait? We don't want to wait. This stupid computer; this website is taking so long to load, I've been staring at the screen for 10 seconds. When is this video going to download? Wait? Forget about waiting. I waited in my car with the heated seats outside of Starbucks for at least 2 whole minutes waiting for my non-fat, no whip caramel macchiato to be served up. What is the barista's problem? I want my drink and I want it now and I want to get out of here.

But God's way of getting us ready for the new creation life is to make us wait. It is not just a dull passive resigned waiting, the kind of waiting that you might see in an airport terminal when the airplane is delayed for four hours. People just flopping over their seats, college students lying on the floor using their backpacks as pillows, listening to their iPods.

Our waiting is not the waiting of resignation. Paul calls it an eager waiting. It is an expectant waiting. We are waiting in hope. It is an intense waiting. It is what the psalmist talks about in Psalm 130:5,

SLIDE – Psalm 130:5

I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.

This picture is of people who have the duty right now to watch on walls through the night and they are waiting for morning to come so that they can rest. Or maybe the city is being besieged and these people are standing on the wall, waiting for morning and for help to come. The psalmist says my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning. It is an eager waiting for the Lord. The apostle Paul says something similar when he wrote to Titus in Titus 2:13.

SLIDE – Tit 2:13

while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,

Do you find yourself eagerly waiting for Jesus, eagerly waiting for your resurrected body, eagerly waiting for a resurrected body for your loved ones, eagerly waiting for the new creation, eagerly waiting to see God?

But we know we can't have it all right now, so there is a patient waiting. V. 25,

SLIDE – Romans 8:25

But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

We can't get ahead of ourselves. The devil always comes along and promises people more than they can have right now. And he shatters us with

disappointment when his false promises don't happen. The devil comes and whispers in your ear: You can have your body totally healed right now all the time. You can have a perfect marriage. You know, the Bible says you shouldn't have any financial problems. There is prosperity for everyone all of the time. And when these things don't happen, then the devil whispers in your ear: where's your God now? You've been abandoned by God. Where is your God now. God doesn't care about you. God is a liar. God won't keep his promises; he doesn't keep his promises to you right now.

Friends, God never promised you or your loved ones that you or they would have no problems. This world is not yet fully redeemed. Our blessed hope – Jesus Christ has not yet come back. And we ourselves right now are only half saved; we're only partially restored. The reason we need to wait not only eagerly, but patiently is so that we don't fall prey to the devil's lies that we can have everything right now. Waiting, patient waiting is one of the ways, one of the main ways that God gets us ready for new creation. He knocks off all our proud insistent demands – you've got to give me this right now, or I won't love you; I must have this now, or I won't obey you. - all of the pride, all of the independent in our lives. He shapes us through patient waiting.

First base, we groan; second base, we wait. Third base, we pray.

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We pray

SLIDE – Romans 8:26-27

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

Spirit-inspired prayer is part of us bringing the kingdom of God, that new creation of God, into our present experience. It says in Zechariah 12:10, as part of the great end time in-breaking of God,

“And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.

God's intention is that redeemed human beings be restored to authority over this world. And that we be the agents through whom the whole of the universe is redeemed and renewed. Now it is our calling to pray. But sometimes we don't know how to fulfill that calling. We don't know what to pray for or how God is going to work through us. In our present condition of groaning and as we experience the groaning creation, we don't even know what to pray for as we are

asking God's kingdom to come to a sick person, or to a family that's overwhelmed by debt. In any situation of groaning, Christian, here is your calling – pray.

You say, "I don't know what to do." Pray.

You say, "I don't know what to pray."

The apostle Paul says that the Holy Spirit himself will intercede within you. That as you, Christian, face the ruin and misery of this world, the ruin and misery of a loved one's life, or of your own life, you find there are no words that you have that express your deepest longings. As you simply bring yourself before God, no words other than I'm just looking to God, the Spirit himself will intercede through you with words and without words. As you groan over this world, you can know that the Holy Spirit is groaning with you and your prayers are being presented to God.

We groan; we wait; we pray; and, we hope – that's home plate. Vv. 24-25

SLIDE – Romans 8:24-25

24 For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? 25 But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

In one sense, salvation is already a reality for us. We were saved, Paul says. But in another sense, we're not yet there. The secret of every great Christian in the past, who has really served Jesus radically in this world, is that they were able to run their minds all the way forward to the blessed hope – the return of Christ and to the new creation. They understood that the power to do well now depended on their ability to lay hold of what they were going to get in the future. Like children looking forward to the summer, like the woman in labor looking forward to the birth of her baby, like an engaged person looking forward to marriage, they understood their present joy and their present endurance depended on their capacity to lay hold of the future.

The great English writer, C.S. Lewis, who is my favorite Christian author and who probably is in a small handful of the most influential Christians of the last 50 years said,

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Christians who did most for the present world were those who saw most of the next, and the reason we are so ineffective in this world is that we have ceased thinking about the next world.

He went on to say:

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Aim at heaven and you get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you get neither.

The heroes of the faith are not people whose lives were easy. They are not folks who somehow miraculously escaped all the pains and difficulties in this world. The heroes of the faith are not people whose marriages had no challenges, or whose bodies had no ailments, or whose kids made no mistakes, or never struggled with depression, or doubt, or poverty. The heroes of the faith are different from us in this one respect. They were people who were full of hope. They had a firm grasp of the future. Every one of the people that you can name who really did something in this world for Christ was looking forward to something more than this world. They had an engine on their plane called Christian hope and that's what made their planes fly so high. They didn't only believe in what Christ did for them in the past. They weren't only hoping to try to live better lives in the present. They were hoping for the new world that Christ will bring us in the future. Hope made all the difference. Let's pray.

The Difference Hope Makes

Rich Nathan

October 27-28, 2007

And Then The End Will Come Series

Romans 8:18-27

1. Our need for hope
2. The logic of the Gospel (Romans 8.18)
3. The scope of our salvation (Romans 8.19-22)
4. How we live right now (Romans 8.22-27)
 - A. We groan
 1. Creation groans (Romans 8.22)
 2. We groan (Romans 8.23)
 3. The Holy Spirit groans (Romans 8.26)
 - B. We wait
 1. We wait eagerly (Romans 8.23)
 2. We wait patiently (Romans 8.25)
 - C. We pray (Romans 8.26)
 - D. We hope (Romans 8.24, 25)