



Central Peninsula Church

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Romans 8:18-25
Mark Mitchell
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The Promise of Glory

SERIES: *His Precious and Magnificent Promises*

Several years ago, Samuel Beckett wrote a play called *Waiting for Godot*, which has become a modern classic. In the play, when the curtain rose, two men were standing on stage with their hands in their pockets, doing nothing, just staring at each other, men without a plan of action and without any gumption to act on it even if they did have a plan. All they did was wait—and hope—for Godot to come.

Who was Godot? They didn't have a clue. What would he do for them when he got there? They hadn't the foggiest. All they knew was that he had promised to come and that somehow things would be better when he got there. They trusted a stranger they didn't know to come and do something for them, but they didn't know what.

But Godot didn't show. Ever. So the two men finally got tired of waiting and decided to leave. But they couldn't make a move. The play ends with them still hanging around with their hands in their pockets. Doing nothing. Just waiting. For who knows what?

A few years ago, on the anniversary of the play's opening, critics asked the playwright, "Mr. Beckett, now that fifty years have gone by, will you tell us who Godot is?"

"How should I know?" he replied.

It seems clear that for Beckett, Godot stands for the pipe dreams that a lot of people hang on to as an escape from their responsibility to make something of their own lives. Dreams that somehow, somebody, or something, will come and rescue them from their troubles.

As followers of Christ, who are WE waiting for? Are we waiting for a nobody called Godot? And what are we waiting for? Someone to come and rescue us from all our troubles? And what do we do while we wait? Do we stand around with our hands in our pockets?

In Romans 8:18-25 the apostle Paul answers these questions for us. He says we're not waiting for Godot, we're waiting for God. He says we're not just waiting to be rescued, we're waiting to be glorified. Meanwhile, he says, we don't just stand around with our hands in our pockets, but we are more like a woman about to give birth to a newborn baby.

1. Our present sufferings will be outweighed by our future glory.

Look what he says in v.18. **"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us."** This verse introduces the theme of this whole paragraph – suffering and glory. What prompted this was Paul's allusion at the end of v.17 to our sharing in the sufferings of Christ so we can also share in his glory. The suffering and the glory go together. It's a package deal in our walk with Christ. It's like a banana: you can't get to the fruit without getting through the peel. Suffering and glory are welded together in Scripture; they can't be broken apart.

Notice also that one has to do with the present and the other has to do with the future. We suffer in the present. Sometimes we suffer just because we're humans living in a fallen world. We deal with physical, emotional and spiritual brokenness. Sometimes we suffer because we've chosen to follow Christ in a world that opposes him. Though we suffer in the present, we look forward to the glory to be revealed to us. That's the future. That's what God has in store for us.

What Paul really wants us to know is that our present suffering cannot compare with the glory to come. He says this because he wants us to be willing to endure whatever suffering God has in store for us. We know what this is all about. This is the suffering of a medical student, willing to endure low pay and ghastly hours in order to one day enjoy placing M.D. after his name. This is the agony of an athlete willing to discipline himself and endure grueling workouts in order to one day enjoy the deep satisfaction of victory. This is the pain of an addict who is willing to do the hard work of recovery because he looks forward to the possibilities of life when he's clean and sober. We know what it's like to endure suffering NOW because we know it's necessary to enjoy a far greater glory that's to come. That's what Paul had in mind when he said in 2 Cor. 4:17, **"For our momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison."**

But it's hard to keep that perspective, isn't it? Tell a

person who is grieving the loss of a child, or in the middle of a round of chemotherapy, or in his second year of unemployment, that their suffering is momentary and light and you might get an argument. But don't forget who wrote this. This would sound like a lot of hot air if it hadn't come from Paul. I doubt any of us has been through what he went through. He was mocked, beaten, stoned, imprisoned, shipwrecked, and starved. Yet he could still say, "This is nothing compared with the glory to come."

It's not that the suffering by itself is nothing; it's that it's nothing *compared* with what is to come. That says more about the glory to come than about our present suffering. Unfortunately, glory is one of those overused religious words that means nothing to us. It's like waiting for Godot. What is it? Part of the problem is that, as Paul says here, it's NOT YET been revealed to us. How do you get excited about something you haven't seen? But I wonder if every once in awhile God pulls back the curtain just a tiny bit so we can see it.

Last Sunday afternoon Lynn and I drove down to Carmel. On Monday morning we woke up and went for a run along the 17 mile drive. It was a spectacular morning - crystal clear blue sky. The ocean was roaring and foaming. The birds were soaring and diving. It was glorious! I wonder if God gives us moments like that so that we just glimpse what glory will be like. After taking a walk through Geneva on a beautiful June day, John Calvin said that God lets us "taste the sweetness of the earth" in order to whet our hope for heaven. I think we get glimpses of glory every once in awhile. It helps me to think of glory as not something *other than* but rather the *fulfillment* of those moments. Lewis Smedes writes, "Some of our truest images of ourselves in heaven are stirred up by bread-and butter pleasures we enjoy here. Have a thigh-thumping laugh at a ridiculous story, and you get a sharp snapshot of yourself happy in heaven. Let a piece of soul music send shivers down your spine, and you have an image of your capacity for beauty in heaven. Watch a giggling two-year-old toddler run into his mother's arms, and you get a fairly good image of yourself in heaven with God. Maybe the happiest memories of ourselves on earth are our clearest images of what we'll be in heaven." The greatest thing is that Paul says this glory will be revealed "into us." It's not going to be like a spectator sport where we watch from a cosmic grandstand, but have no part in it at all. Somehow we're going to be on the stage;

we're going to be involved in it; were going to be part of it. And not just us, but all creation.

2. The present suffering and future glory of God's creation.

Look at vv. 19-22.

"For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now."

When Paul talks about the creation he's referring to the earth and all it contains, including rocks, fields, trees, mountains, rivers and wild horses. He personifies the creation, much like the writer of the Psalms does when he says these things "declare the glory of God." He wants us to know three things about the creation, which relate to the past, the future and the present.

First, in the past, he says the creation was subjected to futility or frustration. Remember back in Genesis after Adam disobeyed God in the garden? God came to him and declared, **"Cursed is the ground because of you."** As a result, God said, **"thorns and thistles it shall grow for you..."** (Gen. 3:17-18). Paul's word for that is futility, frustration. Creation itself has fallen from its original splendor. That's why as we ran along the 17 mile drive there were "No Trespassing" signs all over the place. That's why half of Florida lies in ruins. That's why beautiful animals become extinct. That's why you walk through the forest and see rotting redwoods. In v. 22 Paul talks about "slavery to corruption" or better "bondage to decay." Scientists talk about the law of entropy; everything is decaying, everything is running down.

I woke up the other morning and looked out on my front lawn and I was shocked to see that part of it had been torn up. No kidding! I mean, huge chunks of my green grass just torn out. Someone told me that raccoons did it. Someone else said it was skunks. I still don't know what it was. Now I live in a neighborhood. I'm not the only house with a lawn. But no one else's lawn has been vandalized by marauding animals! Why me? And now I have huge black crows swooping down on my lawn and doing even more damage because all the bugs that live under the grass are exposed. My front yard looks like a construction site. For them it IS a construction site! Browning once said, "God is in heaven; all is right with the world." It's just NOT true. God is in heaven, but all

is NOT right. My lawn's a mess! Everything is decaying.

But notice secondly that Paul says God subjected it "in hope." The hope is that the creation itself will be set free; liberated. This is the future of creation. It will be liberated from something and into something. It will be liberated from bondage to decay and into the same glorious freedom that God's children will enjoy. This is quite a statement and one that most believers don't understand. We think the earth will be wiped out and heaven will be spiritual. We'll all be floating around on clouds. But the Bible talks about "a new heaven and a new earth." God said through the prophet Isaiah that there would even be a new Jerusalem where houses would be built and vineyards would be planted and the wolf will dwell with the lamb and the leopard will lie down with the young goat and no one will eat my lawn! (Is.11:6;65:17-25).

But what about the present? *Thirdly, Paul says the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.* So creation is not what it was, nor is what it shall be, and meanwhile it groans; it aches. And what a fitting picture: a mother in labor, moaning and groaning to give birth to that which will make it all worth it. It's been said that all the sounds of nature are in the minor key. Listen to the sighing of the wind. Listen to the roaring of the tide. Even most of the sounds of birds are in the minor key. All nature is singing, but it's singing is more like groaning.

3. The present suffering and future glory of God's children.

The earth isn't the only thing that's groaning. Look at vv. 23-25.

"And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it."

Paul moves from the suffering and glory of God's creation to the suffering and glory of God's children. Just like God's creation groans, we groan as well. We've been subjected to futility as well. Our bodies are running down, decaying. When I was younger, I used to walk around the house with my shirt off and no one seemed to care. Now they care a lot. Someone asked me recently why men over 50 shouldn't walk around with their shirt off. I didn't know. They said it's because it scares the children and

confuses the babies! I think that about says it all! But it's not just our aging bodies that cause us to groan, it's also our fallen nature. As we've seen, we're constantly battling the flesh. We want to do what's right, but so often we go in the other direction. We say things we shouldn't say. We grow impatient and angry with those who don't comply with our agenda. We can even come to church and treat the people who serve as if they're hired servants who should meet our every need. So often we say things and do things that hurt the very people we should appreciate the most. As a result, we groan inwardly. We long to be rid of this old nature which drags us down into selfishness and sin.

Part of the reason we groan is because God has placed his Spirit within us. He says we have "the first fruits of the Spirit." In the OT the Israelites were expected to bring the first-fruits of their harvest as an offering to the Lord. In doing this, they had the promise of God that the rest of the harvest would follow. Paul isn't saying that we only have a part of God's Spirit and the rest will follow. On the contrary, he's saying that when we become a Christian the gift of the Spirit is God's pledge that the rest of the harvest will be given. It's like the Spirit gives us a little taste of the glory to come, and given our current fallen state, we groan even more, because we're not what we shall be!

What is that we wait eagerly for? Paul uses a number of different phrases to whet our appetite here. He already mentioned "the glory that is to be revealed into us," and "the freedom of the glory of the children of God." In v.19 he used another phrase. He said the whole creation waits eagerly (on tiptoe) for "the revealing of the sons of God." It's like something is going to be revealed then that no one can see right now. It's something so wonderful that all creation stretches out its neck and stands on tiptoe waiting to see it. What is it? It's the revealing of the sons of God.

It's like that show, *Extreme Makeover*. Not the home edition, but the people edition. Admit it – you've watched it! They take someone who wants to change the way they look and they fix him up. They work on his teeth, hair, body and face. It's a painful process. It requires surgery. They fit him into some new clothes. They do it all, but they don't show that person's loved ones what they've done until it's all finished. And the best part of the show is called "the reveal." All that person's friends and family are waiting and then that person who had the extreme makeover walks out and everyone is just blown away. Sometimes they say, "Is that really you?" It

is them, but they're different. They look so much better. It's funny, they try not to say that. They say instead, "You looked great before, BUT MAN DO YOU LOOK GOOD NOW!"

You and I are in the process now of getting an extreme makeover. It won't be finished until we're with the Lord in heaven. It's a painful process. It requires spiritual surgery. But all creation is standing on tiptoe waiting for the big day; the big "reveal" of the sons of God. And we wait too. We can't wait to look in the mirror. "Is that really me?" In v. 23 Paul says we're **"waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."** We've been adopted already into his family, but there is an even deeper child-Father relationship to come when we're fully revealed as his sons. And then not just our spirit but our body will be redeemed. So we'll have real bodies, similar to what we have now, but they'll be new. Philippians 3:21 says in that great reveal God will **"transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of his glory."** C.S. Lewis once said if we just saw now what our brother or sister in Christ would become in that day we would be tempted to worship them.

So what do we do in the meantime? Meanwhile we groan in hope. We were saved, yes, but we were really only half-saved, because we're still waiting for the redemption of our body. You see, hope means we don't have what we want. Hope means we can't see it. But hope also means we look forward to it. Hope is kind of like fishing. I was in Boise visiting my daughter a few weeks and had a chance to do some fly fishing on the Boise River. In about three hours I caught two fish. One was about the size of my little finger, but it still counts! Fishing is all about hope. Someone asks, "How can you stand there for so long for only two fish?" The true fisherman replies, "Hold it! I think I feel a bite." If the line goes slack, he says, "Just wait, he'll be back any minute." And if we look forward to it, we'll be willing to endure anything to obtain it, even the pains of childbirth. That's different than standing around with our hands in our pockets. Tell a woman groaning in labor that she's doing nothing, and you had better get ready to run.

CONCLUSION

So what we're left with in this passage is a kind of tension. We're not what we were, but we're not what we shall be. We still experience the futility of our old life. We live with a broken nature, inside of broken bodies, with broken people on a broken planet. But through the Spirit, we've also tasted just enough of the life to come that we can't wait to look in the mirror and see what we'll become. The result is that life is a kind of mixture of groaning and grinning. We're like a marathon runner in that last mile. We're struggling. We're groaning. But we can see the finish line and that brings a smile; the hope of crossing that line and the glory on the other side brings joy. That's the normal Christian life. Not standing around waiting for Godot. But suffering, groaning, hoping for the fulfillment of God's promise – GLORY!