

## Longing for Home

From Groaning Into Glory – Part III

Romans 8:23-25

### Introduction

C. S. Lewis wrote a classic allegory of the battle between good and evil – between Christ’s kingdom and Satan’s rule over mankind. Perhaps you have read one volume entitled, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. If you have not, I recommend you begin reading it, no matter what your age happens to be.

In this volume, Narnia is under the control of the wicked Witch and the land is bound to perpetual winter. It is icicles and freezing temperatures year round. Under her reign, springtime will never come.

However, Aslan, the lion, comes forward, offering himself to the Witch to be put to death. Her kingdom seems to triumph for a moment, and winter is all that earth will ever know! But, Aslan rises from the dead and defeats the wicked Witch. The snow and ice begin to melt; the flowers begin to bloom; the trees begin to bud. Springtime suddenly comes to the kingdom of Narnia.

Lewis’ allegory is obvious and somewhat applicable to our session today on the groaning of nature. While the earth experiences spring, it is short lived. The hope of spring is replaced with the heat of summer, and the announcement of death in autumn comes true in winter once again. Nature is unable to hang on spring. The conditions of Eden’s garden are only temporary.

The apostle Paul has informed us that nature has a longing for the day when Paradise will return.

John informs us of the coming day when trees will bear fruit year round and of the place where plentiful water flows freely year round. Animals and

all of earth will enjoy the never ending greenery and beauty of a new earth and heaven. There will be freedom forever from the wicked ruler who has been banished to hell forever.

The groaning of nature, Paul tells us, will give way to eternal glory.

### Groaning in a Troubled World – Longing For Home

Nature is not alone in groaning for that day to come. If we return to the paragraph of scripture we are inspecting in Romans, we discover the second groan.

Let us begin with verses 22 and 23 of Romans, chapter 8.

*For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. 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.*

In other words, we are told that creation is groaning and the Christian is groaning.

### The groaning of creation

Part of living a victorious life as a believer is bound up in an understanding that creation is groaning and why. Nature, Paul explained in verses 20 and 21, was affected by the fall of man. It became bound to frustration and corruption or decay.

Genesis, chapter 3, spelled it out. Thorns and thistles became part of a cursed earth. The sounds of nature's groaning began with the evidence of earthquakes, tornadoes, and hurricanes; the fear of animals and the merciless cycles of a violent animal world.

However, God remained in control – not man, but God.

Genesis, chapter 3, informs us that mankind is given the privilege of stewarding nature – making order out of disorder; taming the animals; fighting the elements. Mankind is the steward of this planet, but not the savior of earth.

Earth, in fact, is not dependent on man for its ultimate survival. While mankind should not pollute the earth, but should care for it and tend it as good stewards, it is not going to self-destruct because of something fallen mankind does.

Read the book of Revelation and discover that during the final events of this dispensation, and our planet's bondage to decay, many facts of nature are still true. They include:

- stars and planets are still in the sky;
- the moon is still reflecting the light of the sun and the sun is still warming the earth;
- fresh water and salt water are still plentiful;
- animals and trees are still in abundance;
- people are still covering the earth, reflecting their national identities and organized kingdoms.

According to the description of earth in its final days before God recreates it, it does not run out of oxygen or water or trees or animals . . . or people. In fact, the earth is covered with all of the above.

God is sovereign over His creation. We can enjoy it or pollute it; we can tend to it to our benefit or ignore it to our detriment and discomfort. One day, however, God will make earth and heaven over again (Revelation 21:1).

In Revelation, chapter 22, verse 3a, John sums it up by saying,

*There will no longer be any curse . . .*

Creation is longing for that day.

### **The groaning of the Christian**

Paul also tells us, as believers, that we too groan. Then, he goes one step further in telling us why, and

further still in telling us how to groan in the right way.

While the world does not understand God's plan for creation, I fear that the average believer does not understand God's plan for the Christian, when the Christian:

- is faced with difficult times – and he will be;
- experiences pain – and he will;
- faces pressure and tribulation – and he will;
- faces the ridicule of the world – and he will;
- experiences disease and discomfort – and he will;
- ultimately dies of something – and he will.

The church today has left the Christian without an answer. He has been led to believe fanciful guarantees and mystical promises the Bible really knows nothing of, even though the Bible has been twisted into proving some sort of pain free, disease free, problem free, trouble free, crisis free life.

Just read the New Testament. Read the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, where people were persecuted, ridiculed, cut in half and killed in a variety of other ways, left destitute and homeless, and yet, God says they were people of great faith of whom the world was not worthy.

The question is, what should we truly be groaning about and longing for and how do we go about it?

### **Two key points about the groaning of the Christian**

Paul states very clearly, in the paragraph, two key thoughts.

#### **There is an undeniable presence of groaning in the life of the true Christian**

1. First, there is an undeniable presence of groaning in the life of the true Christian.

#### **There is an unmistakable pattern for the groaning of the true Christian**

2. Secondly, there is an unmistakable pattern for the groaning of the true Christian.

There is the presence of groaning, or longing, in the life of the believer. Look again at the middle of verse 23.

. . . *even we [Christians] ourselves groan within ourselves . . .*

Paul is uniquely and even painfully honest about true Christianity. He says in this verse in the Word of God, that groaning is a reality for the true believer.

Do you watch reality T.V.? Well, this is reality K.J.V. or N.I.V. . . .or, for the more spiritual, N.A.S.B.

By the way, “to groan” comes from the Greek word “stenazo,” which means, “to sigh; to inwardly grieve”. It is a rare word that only appears a half dozen times in the New Testament; three of them in this text in Romans, chapter 8.

The word is used of Jesus, who groaned as He healed a deaf-man, and who groaned as He approached the tomb of Lazarus – obviously grieving over the fact of death among fallen humanity.

It is used of church leaders who, because of disobedient and sinful members of the flock, inwardly groan.

It is a word that carries a deep longing for something better. And Paul says that every Christian is involved!

### **Three reasons Christians groan**

Paul gives three reasons why every Christian groans, and all three of them have to do with the fact that we are waiting for something.

### **Christians are groaning for the final compensation of their inheritance**

1. First, as Christians, we are groaning, or waiting, for the final compensation of our inheritance.

Notice the first part of verse 23 again,

*. . . but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit . . .*

In other words, we are experiencing the first part of our inheritance – the Holy Spirit – but not all of our inheritance. There is so much more that we long to see and have and experience of God.

Paul tells us, in this verse, that the Holy Spirit is the first fruit. What does he mean?

Paul takes from harvest time, an illustration that all his readers would have understood. In Leviticus, the believing Jew was to take the first grain of harvest to the priest. It would become a symbol that this farmer’s entire harvest was consecrated and

dedicated to the glory of God. The first fruit was a gift to God.

Paul, however, reverses the Old Testament idea in this New Testament principle. In this text, the first fruit is not something the believer gives to God, the first fruit is something God has given to the believer. And that something is *Someone* – the Holy Spirit!

The Holy Spirit, then, is the first payment from God on our incredible, eternal inheritance as the bride of Christ. The Spirit signifies there is more to come!

The Bible teaches us that the believer’s salvation and future reward is secured by God the Spirit. Paul reassured the Corinthians when he wrote, in II Corinthians, chapter 1, verses 21 and 22,

*Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.*

In other words, the security of the believer is not related to how much you grow; how obedient you are; how sinless you become; how committed you act. Those are all wonderful things and may very well indicate the reality of living faith, but the security of the believer is not related to that. And, I am glad it is not, because we can all grow more; become more obedient and less sinful; become more passionately committed.

The security of the believer is not related to what the believer does for God, but what God has done for the believer. As believers, our security is not found in what we give Him, but in what He has given us!

The Spirit of God has been given, Paul writes, as the seal and pledge to every believer.

We experience something like that in our real-estate dealings. We pay money down on a loan; we put some money down to hold a property for a certain amount of time.

We do something like that in personal relationships. When we find the girl we want to marry, what do we do? We give them a “down payment” in the form of a ring that we can, in no way, afford. And why did we do that? Because we need help!

How many men listening to this, proposed to your sweetheart with the engagement ring ready to put on her finger? Why did you have that beautiful sparkling diamond ring with you when you proposed? Because you needed help, right? Because:

- you did not deserve her and needed something to help your cause, right?
- you married way above yourself, amen?
- you were proposing to a woman who was so much better than you deserved, amen?! (I thought I would give you one more chance!)

I certainly needed the help! I had broken up with my sweetheart, several times. In fact, I had broken up with her just prior to our senior year in college. She was finished with me. Her dad was finished with me too! I was “Mr. Fickle,” “Mr. Can’t Make Up His Mind,” “Mr. You Hurt My Daughter One More Time And I’m Gonna Kill You.”

This actually has a lot to do with Romans, chapter 8, trust me.

The next fall when it was time to come back to college, I knew that I was about to lose the best thing that ever happened to me. Somehow she agreed to go out with me that fall semester. Her dad was not happy about it and planned to, “have a word with me.”

Then, without her knowing, I began saving money for an engagement ring. I took every odd job I could in order to make extra money. I knew that when I proposed over the Thanksgiving holiday, which was my plan, she needed some measure that I was serious. I had never proposed to her before, but she needed more than words anyway. So, we went to her home for Thanksgiving break – which was where her Dad lived!

For the sake of time, let me just say that a miracle occurred. That’s right, her Dad did not kill me, but no, that was not the miracle. The miracle was, she said, “Yes.”

I can tell you that the ring helped prove that I meant what I said. From what I remember, when she slipped on that ring on her finger and held out her hand, the heavens parted and the angels began to sing the “Hallelujah Chorus”.

My friends, Paul says something in this text, that reveals what God has done for us – the bride of the coming Bride-Groom. He gives us more than words; He gives us more than a promise, He gives us a pledge – the Holy Spirit who indwells us.

Paul emphasizes this truth to the Ephesian believers, in chapter 1, verses 13 and 14 of that epistle,

*... after listening to the message of truth . . . having also believed, you were sealed in Him*

*with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance . . .*

In other words, the Spirit is the pledge of God. That means the Spirit is only the beginning of our inheritance. There is more to come!

Have you ever met a woman who said, “I’m engaged and this ring is all I ever wanted!” or “I’ve always wanted a diamond ring and I don’t care if I ever marry him, this ring is enough for me.”

She might wish later that she had stopped with the ring, but not when she first received it!

Instead, she might say, “Oh my, there’s gonna be a wedding! There’s gonna to be a home! There’s going to be a ‘Mr. and Mrs.’ from here on out! And, if God wills it, there will be a family to grow!”

Every fiancée is excited about being a fiancée, only because the word “fiancée” is going to be exchanged for the word “wife”. And she longs for that day! And he longs for that day.

If you ask an engaged couple how many days are left until their wedding, they will probably know how many. And, do you know what they are doing while they wait? They are groaning. They are sighing. They are sick little puppies. Isn’t it great?! They are groaning for the day when the engagement period ends and marriage begins.

No true Christian ever says, “Having the Holy Spirit as God’s pledge is enough . . .”

No, the believer is groaning; he is sighing; he is longing for the marriage supper of the Lamb. He longs for that better day when the church meets the Bridegroom face to face. He longs for the day when the church sets up in the Father’s house.

However, there is something that we know, isn’t there? An engagement can be broken; a marriage vow can be abandoned. A diamond ring is not enough to make a promise stick; a wedding band is not enough to hold a marriage together. But God’s vow to you will never be broken, for God cannot lie.

That is why His pledge is not a thing – a house, a car, a child, a job, a piece of land, or a diamond ring. God’s pledge to you is a person.

Whoever is indwelt by the Spirit of God belongs to God; and whoever belongs to God, belongs to God forever!<sup>1</sup>

**Christians are groaning for the final consequences of their adoption**

2. Now that we have a taste of who God is, residing within us, we groan for more. Paul says, secondly, that we, as Christians, are also groaning for the final consequences of our adoption.

He writes in verse 23b,

*... [we are] waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons . . .*

We have already studied adoption procedures, back in verse 15, and how they related to biblical theology. For now, let me add that adoption is two-fold:

- First, there is the placing of a child within the family of God.
- Secondly, there is the bestowing of responsibility on a mature son, as they represent the family name and enterprise.

It is this second point that Paul speaks of in this verse. The believer is going to be given the responsibility of representing the family name. The believer will literally reign with Christ. And Paul says he, and every true believer, longs for the day when he will experience first-hand, the glorious reign of Christ.

There is nothing wrong with wanting that – it is part of your inheritance. The true believer longs for the day when the righteousness of God will cover the earth; when His holy reign will fill the earth and all there is. We long for that to happen.

### **Christians are groaning for the final consummation of their redemption**

3. Thirdly, Paul writes that we, as believers, are groaning for the final consummation of our redemption.

In the last part of verse 23, Paul writes,

*... [we groan for] the redemption of our body.*

Ray Stedman commented on this text by writing,

*Our lives consist of groans. We groan because of the ravages that sin makes in our own lives, and in the lives of those we love. We groan because we see possibilities that are not being [embraced]; we groan because we see gifted people who are wasting their lives and we would love to see something [better] happen. We groan in disappointment, in bereavement, in sorrow. We groan physically in our pain and our*

*limitation. Life consists of a great deal of groaning.*<sup>ii</sup>

That is reality. We groan for the redemption of our body!

We groan, like the apostle Paul, and we long for the day when we will dwell in the new heaven and new earth in our glorified bodies – done with sinful flesh; done with pain and suffering.

If you can imagine, we, as believers, are told in Matthew, chapter 13, verse 43, that we will one day,

*... shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of [our] Father . . .*

Daniel records, in chapter 12, verse 3, that the faithful believer will,

*... shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and . . . like the stars forever and ever.*

We, as believers, groan for:

- the final compensation of our inheritance;
- the final consequences of our adoption;
- the final consummation of our redemption.

### **Three ways Christians are to groan**

That is what we groan for, now how do we groan? Let me briefly give three ways Paul tells us to groan.

#### **Christians groan with the assurance of hope**

1. First, as Christians, we groan with the assurance of hope.

Notice verse 24a of Romans, chapter 8.

*For in hope we have been saved . . .*

Now, that does not mean, “we hope we’re saved.” It means, “because we’re saved, we have hope!”

We were saved from hopelessness into hopefulness!

The word “saved” is aorist passive – “we have been saved”. It is a completed action with effects still coming our way!

This is not the hope that says, “I hope I get into heaven.” This is the hope that asks, “I wonder how long it will take for me to get there?”

This is like a child in the back seat of your car on their way to Grandma and Grandpa’s house. Over

and over again, they ask, “Are we there yet? . . . Are we there yet? . . . Are we there yet?”

And, you answer, “No, but we’re closer than we were the last time you asked.”

The believer groans with that kind of longing; with that kind of anticipation, “Are we there yet?”

### **Christians groan without the advantage of sight**

2. Secondly, we, as Christians, not only groan, or wait, with the assurance of hope, we wait without the advantage of sight.

Paul writes further in verse 24,

*. . . but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees?*

You could render this phrase, “For who hopes for what he can see?”

In other words, we hope because we cannot see it, not because we do not believe it exists.

### **Christians groan with an attitude of expectation and courage**

3. We, as Christians, groan with the assurance of hope, without the advantage of sight, and thirdly, with an attitude of expectation and courage.

Look at verse 25.

*But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.*

Our groaning is not depressed moaning, but active, expectant eagerness. We live life with this

kind of attitude. We groan now, but we know our groaning will turn into glory!

Our groaning will one day be exchanged for glory!

I was listening to public radio this week in my pick-up truck. It is one of the few stations I get on that old radio, for some reason. They were interviewing a well known actress of the mid-1900’s. This particular interview was in the last few years of her life – she died in the late 1980’s. She made the comment, near the end of the interview, “I have lived a fabulous life . . . I just can’t believe it’s over.”

For the believer, the attitude is exactly the opposite. We would say, “I have lived my life – some parts fabulous, some parts failure, some parts mountain top, and some parts valley – I have lived my life . . . I just can’t believe it’s really only begun! I can’t believe the best is about to begin!”

This is what we are longing for. And though we groan, our groaning is filled with expectation.

Our faith in Christ means that we believe what we do not see, and our reward will be to see what we have believed.

And then . . .

*It will be worth it all, when we see Jesus;*

*Life’s trials will seem so small, when we see Him,*

*One glimpse of His dear face, all sorrow will erase,*

*So . . . bravely run the race, ‘till we see Christ.*

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 1/18/2004 by Stephen Davey.

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<sup>i</sup> John MacArthur, Romans: Volume 1 (Moody Press, 1991), p. 460.

<sup>ii</sup> R. Kent Hughes, Romans: Righteousness From Heaven (Illinois, Crossway Books, 1991), p. 161.