

Romans
Destined for Glory! (Part 3)
Romans 8:18-25
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This week, I read an article in the BBC news that caught my attention immediately when I saw the headline because it was about art, but art from a little different perspective. It was about art that is intentionally destructive, art intended to make a political statement. Now as one example of such art, the article cites that, back in 1995, a Chinese artist decided to make art, by this definition, by dropping a Han Dynasty urn. Yes, I read that correctly, by dropping and breaking a Han Dynasty urn. Here's how the article reads:

His performance is represented in three black-and-white photos. The artist holds the 2000-year-old ceremonial vase in the first photo; [He's holding it in his hands.] In the second photo, it catches the vase in midair as it falls from his hands to the floor. The third photo shows the vase now shattered on the floor in front of him. [The article says.] By smashing the urn, the artist ruins the monetary value of the ancient object, but also its cultural value. And on a symbolic level, the action represents a rejection of the legacies of the Han Dynasty, a defining period in Chinese history. In this way, he provokes the viewer to consider who determines cultural and monetary values alike.

Now when I read that article, my first reaction to it was, "If that's art, then my two-year-old daughters were brilliant; and if only I had captured all of those events on camera, I'd be a rich man." But then, more importantly as I thought about it for a moment, it occurred to me that this is actually a parable on the nature of fallen man. Ultimately, his nature leads him to destroy all that God has created and then to celebrate that destruction as good. That's the very opposite of the nature and character of God. While God, at times, in response to sin must destroy, it is His nature to create. He cursed this universe that He Himself had made, but that is not His ultimate plan. He's not finished, and that's exactly what we're discovering here in Romans 8.

Romans 8 is about the believer's absolute security. It begins in verse 1 of chapter 8 with "no condemnation"; it ends in verse 39 of chapter 8 with no "separation"; that is from the love of God in Christ. So far in Romans 8, we have learned that our salvation is secure for several reasons. First of all, because God has redeemed us from all condemnation, verses 1 - 4. Secondly, because God has changed and empowered us by His Spirit, verses 5 - 13. Our salvation is secure, thirdly,

because God has adopted us as His children, verses 14 - 17. And in the paragraph that we're studying together, the fourth paragraph, we have learned a fourth reason that our salvation is secure, and it's that God has destined each of us in Christ for eternal glory. That is our destiny, predetermined by God Himself. Let's read it again together, Romans 8, beginning in verse 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. ... 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. 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.

Now in this paragraph, Paul develops a stark contrast, a contrast between our present and our future, a contrast between our present sufferings in this life and our future glory. And in that contrast as he develops it, he teaches us three crucial lessons, three crucial lessons that underscore our security in Christ. We are destined for glory, in spite of what we're suffering in this life. They strengthen our assurance that we are truly in Christ, and they also, these lessons equip us to deal with the sufferings that we inevitably face in our time here in this life. Now, let me just remind you and sort of review what we've looked at so far.

The first lesson that we've learned is that our future glory far outweighs our present sufferings. In verse 18, Paul begins by talking about "the sufferings of this present time." We noted that in context, he's talking about all that we suffer in this life, every circumstance, small or great, that brings you or will bring you grief, sorrow, pain, loss, heartache; all of them are included in the expression at the beginning of verse 18. And our present suffering serves as a dark backdrop for a remarkable contrast.

Notice the second part of verse 18, "the glory that is to be revealed to us." Now that reveals or speaks of two great realities. When he talks about "the glory that is to be revealed to us," he's talking about our seeing God's glory and our sharing God's glory. We're going to be just like

Jesus Christ in our bodies in that we will have a glorified body likened to His glorious body as Paul says to the Philippians, and in our moral characters we will be just like Jesus Christ. That's the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Now the point of this verse, however, isn't those two elements, but rather the comparative weight and value of suffering and glory. That's the point of verse 18. Notice again how Paul puts it, "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." Paul says, "If you took an ancient set of scales, and on one side of the scale you were to place every bit of the suffering that you have, that you are, or ever will encounter in this life, every heartache, every sorrow, every tear, and you were to put it on one side of the scale, and then on the other side of the scale, you were to put the eternal glory that awaits us, as hard as those things in this life are, as difficult as they are, as severe as they can be, they wouldn't even move the scale compared to the glory that awaits us." Our future glory far outweighs our present sufferings.

A second lesson that we are learning in this passage is that our future glory provides hope in our present sufferings. This is the lesson of verses 19 - 23; our future glory provides hope in our present sufferings. That's true of all believers as we'll see in verse 23 and really verses 24 and 25 as well, but it's even true of the creation, and that's where Paul begins in verses 19 - 22. In fact, here's how I have sort of encapsulated the intention of those verses, it's this:. Now, today, all creation groans, but eagerly waits for future glory. We saw the fact of that in verse 19. He simply states it, "For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God." There are two powerful word pictures in this verse. "The anxious longing," that phrase pictures the entire cosmos standing on its tiptoes, craning its neck, to see what's coming. "And waits eagerly" describes the cosmos as if it were eagerly waiting for a friend to arrive. Paul says, "Listen, the cosmos can't wait to see the day when you and I are revealed, unveiled, to be the sons of God, when everybody knows who we really are, when our adoption is made public, and when it's completed with the redemption of our bodies. Why? Why is the entire creation so eager for that?

Well in verses 20 and 21, Paul explains the reason, the reason. And in these two verses as I noted for you last week, Paul demolishes the religion of America, Darwinian Naturalism. And he provides us in these two short versus a thoroughly Christian worldview in three basic parts or three basic components.

Number one, God created the universe, and it belongs to Him. In verse 20, you'll notice he calls the cosmos "the creation" which presupposes a Creator; it was in fact created. God created all things. He spoke them into existence out of nothing.

A second part of the Christian worldview that we saw last time is that God cursed the universe, and it is no longer what it was created to be. Verse 20 says, "For the creation was subjected to futility, not [of its own will,] but because of Him, [that is God,] who subjected it." As a result of man's sin, God subjected the entire creation to futility. In other words, verse 20 is really Paul's commentary on the curse of Genesis 3, and he defines God's curse in three words: "futility", verse 20, that is it no longer accomplishes the full purpose for which God created it; second word, "slavery" in verse 21, that is it is unable to free itself from this curse; and verse 21, "corruption". It's a word that describes decay; the universe is decaying. It is enslaved in a cycle of conception, birth, growth, followed relentlessly by decay, death, and decomposition. God's curse brought futility, slavery, and corruption to the universe.

But the fall and the curse, thank God, are not the end of the story because notice verse 20 says, "the creation was subjected to futility ... in hope." God cursed the universe "in hope", that is in hope of what He was going to do. And what is that great hope? Well, that brings us to today because the answer comes in verse 21 and in the third part of the Christian worldview that Paul presents here. This is where we left off last time. I gave you this point so it may be there in your notes, but we didn't really consider it at all, and that's what I want to do the next few minutes.

The third part of the worldview that Paul teaches in these two verses is this: God will renew the universe, and it will be free of its curse. God will renew the universe, and it will be free of its curse. Notice verse 21; let's kind of pick it up from verse 20, God "subjected" the universe "to futility ... 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." Paul says here, the reason that the entire creation cranes its neck to see and to welcome our unveiling as the sons of God is that creation's fate is inseparably joined two ours. Verse 21 says, "in hope that the creation itself also will be set free." When we are ultimately, fully, finally, completely redeemed; when we experience the redemption of our bodies, and we are everything God redeemed us to be, at the same time, the creation will be set free.

You recognize that expression "to be set free." It means simply to cause someone to be set free from domination or from slavery. In fact, the same expression is used back to Romans 6 where it says, "God freed us from sin." He's going to set free the entire creation in the same way.

Specifically, notice Paul says, “The creation will be set free from its slavery to corruption.” The entire universe is like a slave to its own decay, and it longs to be set free from that decay and deterioration. Paul personifies the universe and pictures it craving the day when it will be free. What does this mean? Why is he using this picture?

I like the way Martyn Lloyd-Jones describes it in his commentary, listen to this.

On what grounds does Paul make such a statement? We do not know exactly, but I wonder whether the phenomenon of spring supplies us with part of the answer. Nature, every year, makes an effort to renew itself, to produce something permanent. It has come out of the death and the darkness of all that is true of the winter. In the spring, it seems to be trying to produce a perfect creation, to be going through some kind of birth pangs year by year; but unfortunately, it does not succeed, for spring leads only to summer, summer leads to autumn, and autumn to winter. Nature tries every year to defeat the vanity, the principle of death and decay and disintegration that is in it, but it fails every time. It still goes on trying as if it feels things should be different and better, but it never succeeds. But it still repeats the effort annually.

I think that’s a great picture of how the entire creation is locked into this cycle of ultimate decay. And although the entire universe is currently a slave to its own decay and deterioration, Paul tells us here that’s not always going to be true. The day is coming when God will set it free from its slavery to decay.

But notice in verse 21, Paul also tells us what the creation will be set free to. “... creation ... will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” Did you notice how Paul repeats the concept of freedom? He says, let me take out the extra words, he says, “the creation will be set free into freedom.” I think he does that because he’s speaking of the fullness of this freedom. He’s speaking of the completeness, the final nature of this deliverance. God will set the entire created world and universe “free from its slavery to ... [decay] into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”

What does that mean, “into the freedom of the glory of the children of God?” It means this, the cosmos will enjoy the freedom from sin and decay and death that is associated with the state of glory that belongs to us, God’s children. We’re going to be glorified, completely free from those things, and the entire universe is going to be set free from them in the same way. It’s going to

share in our glory. There's a hymn called "Abide With Me" in which the author, Henry Lyte of that hymn, puts in this line. He says, "Change and decay in all around I see." That's the world we live in, "Change and decay in all around I see." I think that's what led J.B. Phillips, in his translation of this verse, to put it this way, "The creation will be rescued from the tyranny of change and decay."

So, in verse 19, we saw the fact that all the creation groans but eagerly waits for our revelation as the children of God. In verses 20 and 21, we saw the reason because the creation's future is tied to ours. The entire creation is eager for our day because it will be its day too, when it is completely transformed. In verse 22, Paul illustrates this reality, and he gives us a picture, a picture of exactly what he means. A picture is worth a thousand words, and here it is, verse 22, "For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now." Now notice in verse 22, for the fourth time in this paragraph, Paul begins the verse with the word "For," its because. Here is a reason, an explanation of what he has already said. He just keeps explaining himself, explaining the thing he just said, explain it again. And here in verse 22, he explains, I think, the reason back in verse 19 for the anxious longing and waiting of the creation. Verse 22, "For we know."

Now if you have been a Christian any time at all, if you are familiar at all with the Apostle Paul, you know he loves to say this, "For we know." It's what he says when what he's about to introduce is a commonly known reality among all Christians. He says, you ought to know this, "For we [all] know that the whole creation," now notice back in verse 20, he just referred to the creation; here he wants to make sure we understand he's talking about it all, "the whole creation," all creation. But what is this creation? Well, just to remind you, we discovered that in this paragraph when Paul refers to the creation or in this case, in verse 22 to the whole creation, he means everything that God created except angels and human beings.

Now, why does this passage exclude them? Why would I say they're not included in the whole creation? Because of what the passage says. First of all, verse 20; we learned that all creation he's talking about was subjected to futility. Well, the holy angels weren't subjected to futility, so they're excluded; he's not talking about them. Also, in verse 19, fallen angels don't long for "the revealing of the sons of God." So, both holy and fallen angels are excluded.

But unbelieving humans don't long for the revealing of the sons of God either. The unbelievers around you aren't saying, "Boy, I can't wait for the day when it becomes clear that you belong to God." So, they're not in this passage. And in verse 23, Paul mentions believers separately. Notice how he begins verse 23, "And not only this, but also we ourselves," now talking about

believers. So, what he's talking about in verses 18 - 22, when he speaks of the creation, is all of creation minus angels and humans. In other words, it refers specifically to all subhuman creation, animate and inanimate, the entire universe of matter, plants, and animals.

Now notice what Paul says about the cosmos, "For we know that the [entire] creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now." Now both verbs that are used there in verse 22 occur only one time, only here in all of Scripture. Literally, the whole creation groans and suffers agony together. The reason the word "childbirth" is in there is because the second verb that's used here typically describes the pain that accompanies childbirth. In fact, in its noun form, it occurs in the Olivet Discourse in Mark 13:8, where Jesus is talking about the future, and he describes the birth pangs that precede the end and the second coming; that's the noun form of this word. So, Paul says, "The entire cosmos groans together in pain," but a specific kind of pain; it's the pain like that of childbirth. Now this is actually an extremely encouraging picture; because although the pains of childbirth are very real and can be very severe, they are only temporary; they only last for a short time, and they are not meaningless. They are not without purpose. Although in a fallen world, there are certainly exceptions, most of the time, the pain of childbirth climaxes in the birth of a child; the pain yields the fruit of new life.

I was thinking about this passage this week and my own family, the birth of my daughters. Only our first daughter, Lauren, was born vaginally; the others had to be taken by C-section. And I remember that event. I watched as a dad there in the delivery room; I watched as Sheila went through those hours of labor, and I learned a lot of lessons there. One of those lessons is I'm so grateful for my wife. Another lesson is, men, let me just tell you all those things they teach you in childbirth classes, they're worthless, okay? When I tried to help my wife breathe, that was the last thing in the world she wanted me to do was help to help her know how to breathe. But I also watched after the hours of pain that were involved in that process of delivery, I watched as the pain of hard labor turned to joy in the birth of our daughter; as almost in a moment's time, the pain faded into the joy of that sweet little life that God had given to us. That's what Paul is describing here. He says the entire creation is in pain; it's in suffering, but it's like that of the pain of childbirth.

Now notice he adds, "until now". He's referring to a specific period of time; he's referring from the time when God first subjected the entire creation to futility in Genesis 3 until the time when he wrote this letter in the first century. During that entire time, the entire creation continued to groan and suffer the pains of childbirth. It was true in the first century, and folks, it is still a reality today. But don't miss the profound point that verse 22 is making. The current creation

around us, it's beautiful; it's breathtaking. I know many of you, like I do, love to enjoy the splendor of God's creation, just to take in with your eyes the magnificence of creation whether great or small.

My wife and I, every morning that it isn't too cold, we sit out on our patio, and that's where we have our time in the Word and prayer, just enjoying the beauty of God's creation. It is a magnificent universe that God has made. But at the same time, it has been terribly and profoundly and deeply marred by human sin and God's curse, which makes it all the more amazing, isn't it? I mean this isn't the way it was, and yet it's still incredible. But God has subjected the universe to futility, to slavery, and to decay. But here's the point, all of the turmoil and the upheaval in our universe and on our planet, all of the troubles and struggles in the physical universe, and on this planet itself, are not death throes but birth pains! They are the promise from God of rebirth and restoration.

So, Christians, when you pick up whatever news source you use, when you read of earthquakes and volcanoes and hurricanes and tropical storms like the one on the gulf this morning, or tornadoes or black holes or cosmic explosions, remind yourself that the entire universe is groaning in pain because of the curse, just like a woman in labor. But, it is the groaning and pain of childbirth. There's hope! There's new life coming. The entire cosmos is standing on its tiptoes, craning its neck to see and to welcome as a friend our unveiling as the children of God; the day when our adoption is made public to every intelligent being in the universe, and when our adoption is complete, and we receive our new bodies, and our eternal inheritance. And the reason it can't wait for that day is because the creation's fate is tied to ours. In that very day that we are shown to be God's children, the entire universe will be set free from the curse and its slavery to corruption, and the universe will share in our glory. That's what Paul is saying.

The question is when? When will this renewal happen? Well, let me first of all say, it clearly can't be when the rapture occurs for a couple of reasons. First of all, because what's described here in verse 23, for example, will be true for some, but not all believers at the rapture. There are going to be some who come to faith during the Tribulation Period. But also Scripture teaches that this renewal of this earth will not occur until the end of the seven years of judgment called The Great Tribulation. So, the timing of this renewal of the universe must come after the second coming when Christ deals with His enemies. It will take place at the start of the time period that Scripture refers to as The Millennium, and the word "thousand", describing the thousand-year reign of Christ upon this earth, but this earth renewed. There are a number of passages that promise this restoration, the restoration of this current earth on which we live, this current

universe we enjoy. Jesus, in Matthew 19:28, speaks of this as “the regeneration”. “The regeneration,” that is the bringing to life out of death, the birth, if you will, out of the birth pains.

But I want you to turn to Acts, because Peter talks about this specifically, Acts 3; and in his sermon here, he says in verse 17, “... now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also,” that is in killing the Messiah. Acts 3:18, “But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His ... [Messiah] would suffer, He has thus fulfilled.” Here’s how you ought to respond, Peter says. Verse 19, “Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, [There’s the forgiveness of sins. Repent so that you experience forgiveness, and here’s another reason.] in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.” What does he mean? What are these times of refreshing?

Well, he’s going to explain. Verse 20, “and that He may send Jesus, the [Messiah] appointed for [you. Send him where? From] heaven.” He’s already been, the first coming. He’s returned to heaven; He’s at the right hand of the Father. So, he’s talking here about the second coming. And then he says this in verse 21, “whom heaven [That is Christ; must receive the Messiah. He must stay in heaven.] ... until the period of the restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient times.”

In other words, Peter says, “Christ is going to return from heaven, and He is going to establish this period, that is the period of restoration of all things, and this isn’t a new idea; this was spoken of by God, through the mouth of His holy prophets, from ancient times.” It’s in the Old Testament, this regeneration, this refreshing, this restoration of all things.

But what is it going to be like? Well, there are many passages that describe the restoration of the earth and the universe that Peter talks about here. In fact, I went through this week, and I counted at least twenty-nine Old Testament texts that deal at length with this period that we call The Millennium. Obviously, we can’t go through them all, let me just give you a sampling. Go back to Isaiah. A number of them are in the book of Isaiah; Isaiah, and I want you to turn to Isaiah 2. Here’s what this period of restoration will be like, Isaiah 2:1, “The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. Now it will come about that in the last days.” Now, in the New Testament that phrase “the last days” is used a couple of ways. It’s used of the time from the first coming of the Messiah on, in some cases. But it’s also used of a period at the very end of the church age and clearly that’s how it’s going to be used here because of some of the things that are prophesied. They clearly have not happened since the first advent of Christ. So, let’s walk through this.

Now it will come about that
In the last days [Meaning, at the very end of time as we know it; at the end of the church age.]
The mountain of the house of the LORD
Will be established as the chief of the mountains. [There's going to be topographical changes across Israel, and the mountain, that's known as the place where the house of the LORD stands,]
... will be raised above the hills,
And all the nations will stream to it.
And many peoples will come and say,
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
To the house of the God of Jacob;
That He may teach us concerning His ways
And that we may walk in His paths."
For the law will go forth from Zion
And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
And He will judge between the nations,
And will render decisions for many peoples;
And [warfare will stop] they will hammer their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks. [They won't need the implements of war anymore. Instead they can use them for more profitable tasks.]
Nation will not lift up sword against nation,
And never again [never again] will they learn war.

Folks, that has not happened. That is still in the future; and yet, what's interesting as you read these Old Testament texts about the Millennium, what you discover is a time far superior to our own that's never existed in human history since the fall; and yet, there are still elements in it that show that everything is not perfect. There are still sinful people who need to be controlled and dealt with. Keep that in mind as we turn to another example.

Turn over to Isaiah 11; Isaiah 11. Here's another one of those prophecies about that reign of Christ, the Millennium, the thousand years when He reigns on a renewed planet, after all things are restored. Verse 1, chapter 11, "Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, And a branch from his roots will bear fruit." Stop there for a moment. That is a beautiful Old Testament

picture. In the Old Testament, Israel is often pictured as a great tree. When God judged the people of Israel, when He judged His nation, it's described as if He cut it down to a stump. There was nothing left but just a stump. That's how they returned to the land after the Babylonian Captivity, just a stump, no tree. But then out of that stump sprouts a little shoot. That's the idea here.

I love to walk in the woods near our house, and there's this huge stump from an old tree, pecan tree, native pecan; and out of one side of that stump, there's a shoot that has grown over the last number of years. I've watched it. It started just as a little shoot, and now it's becoming a little tree. That's the description here. This is the Messiah. It looked like God was finished with His people; they were a stump; and then out of that stump comes a little shoot. That little shoot is the Messiah.

The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, [and]
The spirit of wisdom and understanding,
The spirit of counsel and strength,
The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. [the seven-fold Spirit of God]
And He will delight in the fear of the LORD,
And He will not judge by what His eyes see,
Nor make a decision by what His ears hear.

You know, all human judges have to do that, right? They have to look at what they see, and they have to listen, and they make judgments based on what they gather externally because that's all they have. They can't know the heart. But He will make decisions based on more than what His eyes see and His ears hear. He has penetrating omniscience, so He knows what's in the heart. He makes a righteous judgment. He never misses it.

Verse 4, "But with righteousness He will judge the poor." Now watch this because we're talking about a period in the future that's better than what we know, but in which there are still some who are poor.

[He will] decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; [There are those who are afflicted.]
He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth,
And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked.
[And] Also righteousness will be the belt about His loins,

And faithfulness the belt about his waist.
And the wolf [Here's some natural conditions during this period of time.] the
wolf will dwell with the lamb,
And the leopard will lie down with the young goat,
And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; [You know, you can try
that today, and it will last for a little while until one makes a meal of the other.]
And a little boy will lead them. [There'll be no harm to the smallest human from
any animal.]
Also the cow and the bear will graze,
Their young will lie down together,
And the lion will eat straw like the ox.
The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra,
And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den.
They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain,
For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
As the waters cover the sea.
Then in that day
The nations will resort to the root of Jesse, [That little sprout of Jesse, that is the
Messiah.]
[And He] will stand as a signal for the peoples;
And His resting place [His throne room, Mount Zion] will be glorious.

This is the Messiah; this is the Millennium when He reigns.

Now, here are some of the blessings that those Old Testament passages I described, more than twenty-nine of them, talk about during the millennial reign of Christ. I can't take you to all of them, let me just give you a summary. First of all, there are spiritual blessings. There will be those who experience spiritual salvation who are born and redeemed during the Millennium. There will be grace; there will be joy; there will be ethical blessings; the readjustment of social values, an objective standard of righteousness and behavior, an open demonstration of God's moral economy. Someone sins and that will be addressed immediately, someone rebels, and no time will pass until it is dealt with.

There will be social blessings. All warfare will be abolished. For the first time in the history of this planet, there will be complete social justice. Every legitimate interest of human life will receive its place in that wonderful time. There will be political blessings. There will be an

international authority, a world capital based in Jerusalem. There will be one language. There will be physical blessings. There will be, yes, climate change caused by the Messiah Himself.

Mark Twain said, “Everybody talks about the weather, but no one ever does anything about it.” Jesus will; it will be changed so that desert areas become fruitful. There will be increased fertility and productiveness. There will be changes in the animal world; we just read about that. There will be the disappearance of physical disease and deformity. There will be freedom even from the ordinary hazards that we experience in this life. That’s what the Old Testament describes as that time when Jesus reigns on this planet. Understand this: God will free this universe from the curse that He Himself pronounced.

As I was thinking about it this week, one thought captured my mind, and it’s this: it has to happen; it is a moral necessity. Why? Because it’s based on the character of God; it must happen because it is completely contrary to the character of God to leave the universe in its present state of slavery and decay and corruption. He simply can’t do it.

It’s like when I tease my daughters, and I sing the “do re mi” song, and I stop before singing the last note; they just can’t, being musicians, they just can’t handle it. It’s like somebody has to go somewhere and hit that note to finish it. That’s the character of God; He simply cannot leave the universe in the state that it is. And so, now, the creation groans as in childbirth, eagerly waiting for the day that God sets it free. What an amazing passage.

But what are the practical lessons for us from this passage? I want take just a few minutes and point out some very practical lessons from this passage for us. Lesson number one, I’m going to start with some sort for theological ones, and then we’ll get some personal and practical ones. First of all, never underestimate the importance of the early chapters of Genesis.

Today, there are professing Christians who deny the historicity of the creation account in Genesis 1 and 2. They deny the historicity of a literal real personal Adam, a real man named Adam, and they deny the historicity of the fall in Genesis 3. But then they claim that those denials don’t really matter because, after all, they don’t really affect the gospel. That isn’t what Paul would’ve said; because here in Romans, he builds his arguments on the early chapters of Genesis. In Romans 1 Paul bases his indictment of mankind and their sin on the fact that God has revealed Himself in His creation. In Romans 5 he argues that the only legal basis for Jesus serving as our legal representative in justification is based on the fact that a historical man named Adam was appointed by God in the garden as our representative. And here in Romans 8, Paul bases the

present condition of the universe and its ultimate restoration on the historical curse found in Genesis 3. This is an overview, but let me just put it bluntly. Reject the historicity of Genesis 1 - 3, and you ultimately lose the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Number two, lesson number two: don't be deceived. Humans can't destroy the earth, and they can't save it. This is what we hear all the time. Neither is true. God, you see, created the earth. He created the earth for mankind. He provided all of the resources on this planet for the good of mankind as well as His own glory. Man doesn't exist for the earth; the earth exists for man. But don't misunderstand me. We should be good stewards of this planet. We were placed here like Adam to rule over it, to cultivate it, to keep our portion of it. And by our recklessness, we can damage this planet and in places it has been, but we will never destroy it.

In fact, if you want to see damage, the greatest damage that will ever happen to the universe will happen from Jesus Christ Himself during the seven years we call The Great Tribulation. Read the book of Revelation and again and again and again, you see Him unleashing judgment on this universe and wreaking havoc throughout it from the stars in heaven to on this planet itself. And we can't save this planet either, only Jesus can. Because after the cataclysmic judgments of The Great Tribulation, He Himself will renew it to an Eden-like condition, and we will live and reign with Him on this planet completely renewed and restored for a 1000 years. And then, He will destroy this current universe completely.

Revelation talks about the fact that the first heaven and earth fled away for there was found no place for them. And then He creates a new heaven and a new earth. Folks, this current earth is here for us to use, to treat as stewards, but it is ultimately a disposable planet. Our Lord will make a new one in which righteousness is at home. So, don't buy into the cultural noise. We can't destroy the planet, and we can't save it. Only Jesus will do both of those.

Number three, and here we get to the point of the passage: Don't be surprised, discouraged, or frightened by the sufferings of this life. You know, we can be easily tempted to do all those things, can't we? Troubles come into our lives, and we act surprised like, "Why would God let this happen?" Folks, we live in a fallen world. We live in a cursed universe, and God is behind that; and because of that, there are troubles and trials and difficulties in all of our lives. In fact, let me put it to you bluntly, Scripture promises, first of all, that we will have troubles and trials in this world. It's going to happen, so don't be surprised by that. Scripture says you will have tribulations. Job says, "Man is born for trouble as [the] sparks fly upward." It's going to happen, so don't be surprised by it.

But secondly: God will be faithful to sustain us in those trials and to use them for our good. We're going to get there in verse 28 of this very chapter. If you find yourself in the middle of trouble, understand you shouldn't be surprised by that. We live in a fallen world. God didn't protect His own Son from the troubles of this world. He's not going to protect you and me, but He is going to sustain us. He is going to use them for our good.

You know, the number one fear of people in America is what? It's not public speaking anymore, used to be. It's cancer. There are people in our church who are struggling with cancer. Maybe you live in fear of that test, and you get the call from the doctor, "Cancer." Listen, that cancer is a terrible thing. I'm not minimizing the pain and suffering that comes with cancer. But you don't have to live in fear of it because God is the one in charge. There's not a stray molecule in His universe. And if He brings that into your life, He will sustain you and He will use it for good. And Scripture also promises that what awaits us in the future completely eclipses all of the trouble that we endure here. If you take every tear you have ever shed, every sorrow you will ever experience, every heart ache, every grief, and you put it on one side of the scale with the glory that will be yours in eternity, it won't even move the scale.

And a fourth lesson is this: intentionally think about your future glory. Meditate on your future glory as it's promised to you in Scripture, in order to gain hope in your present sufferings. Let me ask you, do you find yourself this morning in the middle of suffering? Are you in the middle of a very difficult, severe trial? Did you have a miserable week? And as a result of these trials and troubles, are you discouraged, disheartened? What do you do? How do you respond? Well don't respond like some try. Don't just try to sort of bury the pain in pleasure which is what some do, or bury the pain in some substance, alcohol or drugs or something. Don't try to just distract yourself, "Well I don't think about it, so I'm going to do something fun." There's nothing wrong with doing something fun to enjoy your family, enjoy life, but don't let that be your primary reaction to the pain and suffering in this life. Do what Paul does here; look back at verse 18 of Romans 8. He says, "I consider." That word is "reckon;" I count. He means, "I logically come to this conclusion on the basis of the facts; and in this case, on the basis of the facts of the gospel." That's how you respond! God intends that the promise and expectation of your future glory would provide you with hope in your present suffering here; just like it does all of creation.

How does this happen? Well, you know that one of my mentors is a man I never met, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. And this saying of his is buried deep in my soul; if you've been here anytime at all,

you've heard me say it many times. "Stop listening to yourself, and start talking to yourself." What did he mean by that? He means don't let your mind just take you where your mind will take you. That's how most people live; they just let their mind go like they can't control it. It just takes them wherever it wants. No, don't listen to yourself, talk to yourself. By that he meant, take the truth of Scripture that you know and understand, and preach the truth to yourself.

In other words, when your mind starts drifting you along and you're living in self-pity and discouragement and despair, tell yourself to shut up. I do that! Seriously, I'm driving along in the car, "Pennington, just shut up!" And then preach the truth to yourself; what does God say? And as you preach the truth to yourself, you gain this hope because just as surely as a woman in labor gives birth to a child, and just as surely as this universe will give birth to a renewed creation, for us who are in Christ, the trials and sufferings that we endure in this life give birth to our eternal joy and glory.

In fact, turn over Matthew 13. There is buried in one of our Lord's parables this amazing verse. Matthew 13, beginning in verse 36, Jesus is explaining the parable of the tares, that there are believers and unbelievers mixed in the visible demonstration of the kingdom that is within the church and those who profess Christ. Verse 40, he says,

"just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. [Those unbelievers who are all mixed in with God's people.]" Verse 41:

The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

You know, let me just say, if you are here this morning, and you are not a follower of Jesus Christ, that's you. You are living in lawless rebellion against your rightful King; and Jesus says that at the end, He will send forth His angels to send you to this fate. I plead with you today; run to Jesus. Let your cry be, "Give me Jesus," as you heard the choir sing morning because He never turns away anyone who comes to Him.

But here's the other side of it for the rest of us, verse 43, "Then [If you have accepted Christ, if you have embraced Him as Lord and Savior] Then THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN in the kingdom of their Father." Christian, that is you! You are going to be so glorious

with the moral beauty of Jesus Christ that you “WILL SHINE FORTH LIKE THE SUN in the kingdom of your Father.” That’s something to live through the trials of this life to receive.

Let’s pray together.

Father, thank you for the encouragement this passage is to us, for the comfort that it brings. Lord, I pray for those who are here this morning who find themselves discouraged in the middle of severe and difficult trials, heartaches, sorrows. Lord, may these truths be rich to them; may You use them by Your Spirit to provide real comfort to their hearts even as You intended it to be?

Father, for the rest of us, help us to think biblically; help us to think like Christians as we encounter the troubles of this life and to weigh the troubles of this life against the weight of eternal glory, to live with an eye on the future, an eye on heaven, and not merely on the circumstances immediately in front of us.

Father, I pray for those who may be here this morning who are still without Christ. Help them to see that this is not their story, but rather their story is found in that sobering verse we just read from our Lord’s own mouth about what awaits them? Lord, may they run to Jesus and find grace and mercy before they face Him as Judge? May they do so even today.

We pray in Jesus’s name, Amen.