



# HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

Hope in Misery

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Romans 8:18-25

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*<sup>18</sup> For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. <sup>23</sup> And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup> For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*

*(Pastor prays)*

One of the reasons I hate the prosperity gospel and all its perversions is that it doesn't have a category or mechanism to deal with pain or suffering beyond avoidance or saying that it's not God's will for His children to suffer, which seems strange to me since so many heroes of the faith are heroes because they were obedient even to the point of death. In fact, our whole movement is built on Jesus Christ, who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, nailed to a cross and suffered in agony on our behalf.

The verse that precedes this passage says we are children and heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may be glorified with Him. And what Paul says about suffering in this passage is astounding when you consider what Paul himself said about his suffering in 2 Corinthians 11:24-28.

*<sup>24</sup> Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. <sup>25</sup> Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; <sup>26</sup> on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; <sup>27</sup> in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. <sup>28</sup> And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.*

Suffering. It's what Jesus endured, it's what Paul experienced, and we will too. We need to have the right category to walk with pain and loss and hurt and anxiety and loneliness in a Christ-honoring, God-glorifying way because:

### **This World is Messed Up but a New One is Coming**

To rightly understand that, we need a few things I think this passage provides.

#### **We need a new theology of pain**

In verse 18, Paul offers a general statement and a spiritual challenge. Let's take a look at it. <sup>18</sup> *consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.* It's important to see the suffering/glory theme that was introduced in verse 17 run through this entire passage. there are several things I want to point out.

The first one is that sufferings are plural. They are varied in scope and intensity, variety and frequency. These sufferings are not just because you follow Jesus and are being persecuted, but it's a whole gamut of suffering. It's illness, loneliness, anxiety, bereavement and depression. It's being broke or even death. Pick your suffering. Let's go back to verse 18. Suffering is now, glory is later, and they can't be compared. As troublesome as our problems are, they are of no weight when set over against the glory that awaits God's people; the glory that was purchased for us at the cross of Jesus. Verse 18 says you can't compare the two. As ridiculous as it might be, I can compare a thimble of water with the Atlantic Ocean and see how much greater the ocean is. But Paul says that isn't enough. There's too much glory and too little suffering for there to be any comparison. Our problem is that sometimes all we can see is the suffering and it blocks out hope and smothers our joy. And this passage is here to strengthen you in the Lord. Suffering is a messenger that says, "Hey this is not all there is". 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 says, <sup>17</sup> *For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all*

*comparison, <sup>18</sup> as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*

Arthritis is there to help you lose your grip on things that don't matter so you can put your faith in the one who does matter. Suffering is the sanctifying reminder that this world is not our home, that Jesus is King, and His Kingdom comes through suffering. What did Charles Spurgeon say, "I have learned to kiss the wave that throws me against the Rock of Ages." This world is messed up but a better one is coming. In the meantime, we need a theology of suffering that drives us to the wounds of Jesus where there at the cross He died for sinners and promises us a better world.

### **We need a new explanation for pain**

By saying "That's just the way things are," or "It is what it is", that's fatalistic and non-sensical. In verses 19-22, Paul gives us some explanations. Let's read it and then try to sort of sequentially explain it.

*<sup>19</sup> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.*

Creation is personified in verse 19 and it's seen as eagerly waiting. It's standing on its tiptoes with its neck stretched out looking for something; looking for the unveiling, the revealing. That word means "uncovering" of the sons of God. It's looking forward to the second coming of Christ when saved people will be fully sanctified and the covering of this sinful body is gone. We will wrestle with sin no more.

But before we get too far, verses 20-21 explain the problem of evil and why the world is the way it is. Verse 20-21 is one sentence telling us three things. Creation is not what it should be or what God created it to be. Sin has had cosmic and devastating consequences to the world. God always builds in hope.

Let's start with the first one that creation is not what it should be.

Verse 20 says, *For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it.* Paul has taken us back to Genesis and the creation account. All that God created was good. Adam and Eve were together, fitting perfectly and living harmoniously, and creation didn't desire to be of harm. It wasn't subjected willingly. This brings us to the next big issue. Creation was subjected to futility not willingly but because of him who subjected it. God did that. Go back in your mind to chapter 3 in the Garden of Eden and the sin of Adam and Eve and what God said to Adam in Genesis 3:17-19. <sup>17</sup> *And to Adam he said,*

*“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife*

*and have eaten of the tree*

*of which I commanded you,*

*‘You shall not eat of it,’*

*cursed is the ground because of you;*

*in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;*

<sup>18</sup> *thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;*

*and you shall eat the plants of the field.*

<sup>19</sup> *By the sweat of your face*

*you shall eat bread,*

*till you return to the ground,*

*for out of it you were taken;*

*for you are dust,*

*and to dust you shall return.”*

That's the subjection to futility and frustration in verse 20. Paul sums up the story of God's curse on the planet because of sin with one word, futility. Emptiness. It's why a man or woman can work hard all his life and get to the end and think, “What did I amount to?” It's why people get fabulously wealthy only to be woefully depressed. Futility. It's what the entire book of Ecclesiastes is about. It's the frustration of living a life in pursuit of everything this world has to offer and coming up short time after time.

And God did that. He subjects this world to futility for a purpose.

Let's go back to that purpose and read verses 20-21 again. <sup>20</sup>*For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope* <sup>21</sup>*that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.* In hope.

The futility is here to remind us that the day is coming when creation, the world we live in, will be set free from its bondage. Look at the groaning in verses 22-23. Creation groans and we groan. We groan because of sin. We groan because of hurt. We groan because people die young and marriages don't last. We groan because of the wayward children and the unjust systems. We groan when gifted, talented people waste their lives. It's not just you groaning inwardly; verse 21 says that the whole creation is groaning, groaning at the deep sorrow over the situation we find ourselves in.

But before you get too far here, this isn't some meaningless throbbing pain for pain's sake. When you get your heart broken, it's not broken arbitrarily. That groaning is going somewhere.

Look carefully at verse 22 at the kind of groaning and agony. It's the same for us in verse 23. We know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth. These aren't the last groanings of a dying person. Here is the mother in labor, breathing heavy and in terrible pain, but that pain leads to a glorious new life. Creation's agony, sin's destructions, our battles with depression and despair and meaninglessness, our need for purpose, all that pain has a glorious design.

Let's finish it out with the Bible in verses 23-25.

<sup>23</sup>*And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.* <sup>24</sup>*For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?* <sup>25</sup>*But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*

Salvation is already ours in Jesus, His life death and resurrection. But the full enjoyment of it lies in the future. The spirit gives us joy. The coming glory gives us hope, but right now we wait, knowing that this world is messed up but a better one is coming and at the head of that glorious day is Jesus.

*(Pastor prays)*