

“The Best is yet to be”  
Romans 8:18-25  
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Most people only purchase an automobile on credit because they believe that in the future they will have sufficient income to make all the payments.

College students will go thousands of dollars in debt because they believe that in the future they will earn the incomes necessary to repay the loans.

My point is that **what you believe about the future controls what you do in the present.**

When I say “controls,” I mean that what you believe about the future so powerfully influences you that nearly every intentional action now is consistent with it.

A positive illustration of this is to watch a young man set his mind on winning the heart of a young woman.

He pictures himself with her in the future and that vision controls his every thought and action.

A negative illustration is to watch a man or woman in a disintegrating marriage become so convinced that the future will be no different than the present that they give up.

Listen to a man who sees no future: “We’re here to die, just live and die. I live driving a cab. I do some fishing, take my girl out, pay taxes, do a little reading, and then get ready to drop dead. You’ve got to be strong about it. Life is a big fake. Nobody cares. You’re rich or you’re poor. You’re here; you’re gone. You’re like the wind... Life is nothing.”

From *Can Man Live Without God*, by Ravi Zacharias

Is he right or is there more?

Christ calls people to a very different perspective on the future and therefore a very different perspective on life now.

What comes **after** this life, I think, has an all-important bearing on how we live **this** life.

Notice, I didn't say that how we live *this life* has a bearing on the *life to come*, though that is certainly true, but I said whether there is a life to come has a bearing on how we live this life.

As I have already said it, your belief about your future controls your present.

Repeatedly in Paul's letter to the church in Rome he speaks of "life." Instead of death and damnation, he says, those who trust Christ will have life, life with an eternal quality.

In chapter 5 Paul said we have peace with God, we have access to his grace, and we have the hope of a future in the glory of God.

Paul then goes on to write about **how** we live Christianly in the mean time, because it is the "mean time" that troubles us.

The "mean time" is where we live.

And Paul, like Jesus, knows the "mean time" is difficult.

God calls us out of a value system and a lifestyle to one that is radically different than the worlds.

- We have a different master than the rest of the world.
- We play by different rules than the rest of the world.
- We have different objectives than the rest of the world.

We respond to Christ's call to trust and obey him and what do we get?

He tells us that our new values and lifestyle will be opposed both from within ourselves and outside ourselves.

From within we know the struggle we have with sin – Paul describes it in chapters 6 and 7.

And then add to that, when we look around at others, it appears that the **un**righteous prosper and the **im**moral have the fun.

Jeremiah 12:1 "You are always righteous, O LORD, when I bring a case before you. Yet I would speak with you about your justice: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?"

The issue is as old as Job.

The question is, “Is following God it worth it?”

There are several positive answers to that question and Paul in our text for today is going to give one of them.

Before looking at that specifically I want you to remember that Romans 8 has rightly been called a chapter of great assurance, assuring the believer that what he believes is true, that following Christ is worth it, and that God both now is and in the future will do what he has promised.

As we have seen in previous sermons, and will see in two sermons to follow this one, this chapter is meant to assure us of our relationship with God.

In this lengthy chapter are a number of truths you can count on as a Christian.

8:1-3 First, mark it down, **you are no longer under condemnation** because Christ has done for us what the law could not do. This summarizes justification by grace through faith.

8:4-13 Secondly, you are no longer enslaved to that sin nature you inherited from Adam, but now, because the Spirit of God is in you, **you have the Spirit-empowered ability to live for Christ**, to live Christianly.

8:14-17 Thirdly, you have the closest possible relationship with God; **you have been adopted into God’s family as his child.**

8:17-25 Fourthly, **you have an inheritance**, a future, that overwhelmingly surpasses the present and makes the present worth it - no matter what the present may hold.

8:26-28 Fifthly, even now, in every circumstance of life, **the Spirit of God is interceding for us and God is controlling every circumstance of life, even the hardest things of life and using them for our good.**

8:29-30 And lastly, always remember, **what God starts, he finishes** – guaranteed!

**It is that fourth issue that I want you to better understand today.**

## Romans 8:16-25

“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.

<sup>17</sup> Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

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

<sup>19</sup> The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.

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

<sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

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

<sup>23</sup> Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

<sup>24</sup> For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has?

<sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

In verse 16 Paul completes his declaration that God has adopted us; we are God’s Children.

In verse 17 he says that **since we are** children of God **then we are heirs** – we look forward to an inheritance.

But in that verse he also reminds us of the present reality that suffering lays along the path to that inheritance.

But it is in verse 18 that we find the main point of this section: “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”

**Paul says I want you to know something about the future that is so positive that it will powerfully change your perspective on the here and now.**

In fact if you understand what is yet to come, it will make your present sufferings seem insignificant by comparison.

What is this future he’s talking about?

Here he calls it “the glory that will be revealed in us.”  
In verse 17 he said we would “share in (Christ’s) glory.”

I want to come back to that in a few minutes and see how Paul gives it further definition.

But for now I want you to see that in verses 19-23 Paul gives us a very short history of the world.

However we notice he doesn’t give that history in chronological order.

Verse 19 is about the present “The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.

Verse 20 is about the past “For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it,

Verse 21 is largely about the future, “in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

Verse 22 is about the past right up to the present, “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

Verse 23 is the about the present looking forward to the future, “Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Now, I want to put those thoughts into chronological order

First **the past**: Verse 20, “For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it...”

The “creation” here is the equivalent of Genesis 1:1 “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

Paul is talking about the universe of stars and planets around us, he is talking about the oceans, mountains, prairies, lakes and hills of this earth, and he talking about plants, fish, birds and animals – all creation except humanity.

And he says that in the past, something happened to that creation: “it was subjected to frustration...”

Frustration is not being able to be and do what you want or ought to be able to be and do.

God created the heavens and earth as an expression of his glory.

Creation manifests something about God – as Paul said it in Romans 1 “God’s eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen from what has been made.”

**But creation is frustrated in no longer having the full beauty and function it was designed for.**

This takes us back to Genesis 3 when Adam sinned: Genesis 3:17-18 “To Adam (God) said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’ “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.<sup>18</sup> It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.”

Yes it is still true that the heavens declare the glory of God but imagine what that declaration would have been, had the creation not been warped by sin.

But notice, the creation didn’t bring this frustration on itself.

It was the result of Satan’s temptation, Adam’s sin and God’s judgment.

Sin has consequences and the judicial consequence of Adam’s sin was that the whole creation suffered.

That may seem unreasonable to us but that is only because we don’t have an adequate understanding of the sinfulness of sin.

Because of sin the whole of creation is now in “bondage to decay.”

The cycle of conception, birth, and growth is followed by decline, death, and decomposition. (Stott, 239)

The earth is not as friendly as we like to think.

We like to dwell on beautiful sunsets and swelling oceans.

But just watch an episode of “Wild Kingdom” or look at the devastation of animals in a forest fire, or the suffering caused in Bangladesh by a cyclone and realize that something is dreadfully wrong.

The “frustration” of the creation, due to sin, is certainly felt by humanity.

We were made in the image of God and yet we have had 6-10,000 years or more of human history and can’t seem to get it right.

Look at how many times new utopian ideas have been suggested as the answer to humanity’s propensity to selfishness, hostility and war – none succeeds - frustrating.

As necessary as they are, there is a certain frustration with all the “peace agreements” made year after year and then savagely broken.

Just this past week world leaders met in Annapolis to consider yet another attempt at peace in the Middle East.

Closer to home, we celebrate a family converted from generations of sin and pain only to watch in frustration as members of that same family return to the same sin and misery within two generations.

Or within ourselves, we see some progress in our spiritual maturity but are so frustrated by our private sins that we wonder if there is any hope for us.

Frustration – oh yes – all creation was subjected to frustration!

**But the past is not the end of the story.**

Paul writes that he wants us to understand what is happening even now, in the present.

Look at verse 19 “The creation **waits in eager expectation** for the sons of God to be revealed.”

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

To make his point, Paul personifies creation; he gives it emotion and thought.

It is as if creation is eagerly expecting something.

The word translated “eager expectation” is one of someone craning his neck to see something very good.

And in verse 22 it is called a groaning.

But Paul is not only describing the rest of creation, he is talking about us in the present as well.

Verse 23, “Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly...”

Now groaning is because of pain.

This is speaking again to the idea of the consequences of sin in the world, the frustration of it.

But the kind of groaning is important as we saw in verse 22 – it is a “groaning as in the pains of childbirth...”

It’s painful but it’s worth it.

Jesus said it this way in John 16:20b-22 “You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. <sup>21</sup> A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. <sup>22</sup> So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.

One man wrote that when you hear a woman groaning in a hospital it makes all the difference if you are not in the oncology ward but in the maternity ward. Piper Romans 8:18-25 Part 2

So what’s the baby?

What makes it worth it?

What is all creation anticipating?

What do we wait eagerly for?



**We've looked briefly at the past and the present; now we see the future:**

Verse 19, Paul says creation waits **“for the sons of God to be revealed** and in verse 23 **“we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.**

We are already sons and daughters of God, adopted into his family, but we don't fully reflect him yet.

We not only still struggle with our old sin nature but even our bodies are still subject to decay and death.

Many years ago Isaac Watts wrote in a hymn:

Behold th' amazing gift of love  
The Father hath bestowed  
on us, the sinful sons of men,  
to call us sons of God!  
**Concealed as yet this honor lies,  
by this dark world unknown,**

But that day is coming when the fullness of what it means to be sons of God will be fully actualized, revealed.

1 Corinthians 15:50 “I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

Our present mortal bodies, corrupted by sin, must be transformed.

When Jesus comes again, Paul said to another church, 1 Corinthians 15:51-52,54 “Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep (die), but we will all be changed in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed... When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

Paul is talking about the **resurrection** of our **bodies**.

In Romans 8:23 he calls it **“the redemption** of our **bodies.**”

He has already raised this issue earlier in verse 11, “And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead **will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit**, who lives in you.”

To the Philippians Paul said, Philippians 3:20-21 “But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

The Apostle John wrote, 1 John 3:2 “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”

As I have said so many times, everlasting life is not our disembodied spirits floating forever in some God-consciousness.

Everlasting life includes a real body, a resurrected body.

**But verse 21 brings our resurrected bodies and the creation back together.**

Romans 8:21 “the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

When Jesus comes again and when the bodies of the children of God are resurrected and reunited with their spirits, **that is when the rest of creation will also be transformed.**

2 Peter 3:10-13 “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

<sup>11</sup> Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives

<sup>12</sup> as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.

<sup>13</sup> But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

Revelation 21:1 “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away

In some way, whether by literal fire and destruction or otherwise, God is going to renovate, transform or recreate this present heavens and earth into a new heavens and earth.

What will that new earth be like?

Do you remember that the Bible says that Jesus’ resurrected body was the same but different?

Do you remember that the Bible says our resurrected bodies will be the same but different; they will be our bodies but new, recognizable but transformed?

Likewise, I believe the new earth will be this earth but new, the same but transformed, physical and recognizable.

Most importantly, God will refashion this world into what he originally intended it to be before sin entered it and warped it.

But why, why a new heavens and earth?

Why not just “heaven?”

Because God intends for us to enjoy our inheritance and the heaven, to which believers now go when they die, is not that inheritance.

And what is that inheritance?

**It is to live in real bodies and with all the rest of creation live in and reflect the glory of God**

The glory of God is his character revealed - His beauty, power, truth and love.

Even now we love beauty – a glowing sunset or a dew-covered rose. The best stories of humanity are not the stories of avarice, lust and revenge of much of television, motions pictures and pulp fiction.

Our best stories are of true greatness, sacrificial love, real peace, and tender mercy.

We revel in genuine grace and truth.

Though now we only see those perfections dimly, we nonetheless know them when we see them and they are the subjects of our best stories and pictures.

That's why Jesus was so stunning to those around him: John 1:14 "We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

God's love, his mercy, his goodness, his holiness, and all his other perfections need to be seen and experienced.

It is not a matter of God proudly needing the worship and admiration of others.

For love to be love it must be expressed.

The glory of grace is when it is experienced.

The glory of beauty is when it is seen or heard.

The glory of power is when it is displayed.

The glory of truth is when it's known.

Somewhat of an aside, this is to me another evidence for the Trinity – the perfections of God would be deprived of significance without a multiplicity of persons to enjoy them.

God's love would mean nothing if there was no one to love.

But there is – the Father loves the Son and the Spirit and the Spirit and the Son love the Father.

And wonder of wonders the Triune God chose to let us in on that.

All of creation including the animate and inanimate world and especially humanity, made in the image of God, exist to reflect, manifest, exhibit, declare, delight in the glory of God.

The chief purpose of all creation is to glorify God.

Our chief end, our fulfillment, is to glorify God **and to enjoy him** forever.

That was God's intention from the beginning.

Genesis 1:28 “God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

But as we have seen, sin interrupted, distorted, and corrupted.

But Jesus said in Revelation 21:5 “Behold, I am making all things new.”

Speaking of the new heavens and earth God said in Revelation 21:7 “He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

Our inheritance is to fully live in and reflect the glory of God without the distortion of sin and decay.

And part of our inheritance is to participate with all the rest of creation in that same glory.

If the heavens and earth simply cease to exist, who will join us in declaring the glory of God?

Don't we believe that what Isaiah said will be true?

Isaiah 55:12-13 “The mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.<sup>13</sup> Instead of the thorn bush will grow the pine tree, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow. This will be for the LORD'S renown, for an everlasting sign, which will not be destroyed.”

The future that Paul describes is the future that God had planned for us all along.

It's a long text but how long since you've read Isaiah 65:17-25<sup>17</sup> “Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.<sup>18</sup> But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy.<sup>19</sup> I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more.<sup>20</sup> “Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live

out his years; he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed.<sup>21</sup> They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.<sup>22</sup> No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the works of their hands.<sup>23</sup> They will not toil in vain or bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the LORD, they and their descendants with them.<sup>24</sup> Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear.<sup>25</sup> The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain," says the LORD."

So, is it worth it?

Romans 8:18 "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

2 Corinthians 4:17-18 "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.<sup>2Co 4:18</sup> So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.