

Venture LifeGroups
Eight
Session 4: Groaning Now, Glory Later
Romans 8:18-25

Main Point

The inheritance that has been promised to us gives us hope and the determination to persevere in the midst of our present suffering.

Introduction

1. Think back over a difficult time in your life. What predominant emotions did you feel during that time?
2. What is something you wish you could have heard during that season of suffering?
3. At the time, how did you think God felt about your situation and what did you think He was doing? How was that different from what He actually had planned?

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Read Romans 8:18-23.

1. What does this passage have to say about personal and global suffering?
2. Read 2 Corinthians 11:22-27. What made Paul the appropriate teacher on suffering?
3. What can we learn from Paul about the attitude God wants us to have as we face suffering?
4. How have you experienced the groaning of creation recently? What news stories have given evidence of this reality?
5. Read Revelation 21:1-5. What is the goal of all redemption?
6. What do you think it will be like to live without fear, pain, or death? What do you think it will be like to live in the continual and direct presence of God?
7. From what aspects of life on earth do you most look forward to being set free?
8. Read verse 23 again. The Holy Spirit acts as the firstfruit, or down payment, for our future glorification. What do you know about the Old Testament principle of harvest firstfruits?
9. How does this concept enhance your understanding of what else lies ahead for Christians? Explain.
10. What are some of the key benefits of having the Spirit within you? How has the Holy Spirit's presence changed the way you view the present sufferings of this life?

| Read Romans 8:24-25.

1. According to Paul, how are we to live in the meantime while we wait for our future glory?

2. How do you know the future glorification you read about in Scripture will actually happen? What does Paul teach about Christian hope?

Application

1. Does hope come easily for you? Why or why not?
2. How does the promise of future glory help you live more positively in our broken world?
3. How can the Holy Spirit help you endure trials this week?
4. How can we encourage one another to live in hope and patience as we face our present sufferings?

Commentary

Romans 8:18-25

8:18. Paul knew firsthand a degree of suffering that most of us cannot imagine (see 2 Cor. 11:23-28). He must have wondered about the reason for these difficulties and perhaps wondered if somehow he could avoid them. He came to an inescapable and rational decision that his sufferings were not worth comparing with the glory that would be his in the future. Paul knew his ultimate destination was heaven. The reward of heaven would be for him far better both in terms of quality and of duration. He would not allow his focus in this life to be consumed by his suffering. He was always striving to keep an eye toward his ultimate reward.

8:19. The “glory” that will be revealed to us became the occasion for Paul to think about the redemption of all creation. By our sin, we have brought a great corruption into the world. Sin has stained everything. God’s concern and plan is to make all things right again, reflecting anew His original plan. Paul personified creation to indicate the extent of this redemption. God will cleanse every form of evil from His creation. God’s preeminent example of this regeneration is His sons who will be revealed. One day God’s children will be made perfectly into what God intended for them. We do not know exactly what all this will mean, but the beauty reflected by God’s children will resonate with the beauty of God’s entire universe. In this sense creation waits with anticipation, looking forward to the day when all of God’s creation will perfectly reflect His original plan.

8:20. For the creation was subjected to futility refers to the corruption of nature because of sin. Genesis 3:17-19 describes the ruin that resulted from Adam and Eve’s sin and provides the imagery for Paul’s use of futility in this verse. The word can also be translated as “vanity” or “emptiness.” It describes accurately the contrast between the fullness God intended and the emptiness that resulted from sin. Creation was stained by sin. Creation did not spin out of control, going off on its own, but was still subject to God. He remained sovereign though sin corrupted. God forced humanity to endure the consequences of sin because He would not allow sinful humanity to live in a perfect creation. For this reason, creation had to suffer as well. God did this, however, in hope. He had a plan to return to His original design.

8:21-22. The bondage of corruption again reflects the images of Genesis 3:17-19. Just as sin enslaved humanity, it also bound creation and prevented the fulfillment of its purpose, testifying to all that God is. Though nature still testifies to “God’s eternal power and divine nature” (1:20), we can only imagine what will happen once it is set free from all of sin’s effects. This freedom coincides with the glorious freedom of God’s children. Though wrong seems powerful, it is limited. Paul consistently had reminded his readers that suffering, affliction, and difficulties of every kind are not the last word in God’s plan. Nor do they represent a frustration of God’s plan. Joy will come.

8:23. To have the Spirit as the firstfruits means to have the down payment on this future glory and joy. God’s Spirit is present in Christians, God is at work in the creation, and His promises are being fulfilled. We know these truths, yet at the same time we groan within ourselves as we strain forward to the glorious future. The presence of sin pains Christians precisely because we have a clear hint of what God will bring about. We groan because we long for God to bring His plan to completion. Paul focused

here on the redemption of our bodies. We experience the effects of sin in various ways. Sin takes a physical toll on us, and in fact physical death itself is a result of sin. Where we feel sin's effect most acutely, we also will experience God's blessing. Redemption means "purchased from bondage." God will liberate our bodies, restoring us to divine health that is both spiritual and physical.

8:24. Our salvation ushers us into an entirely new present and future. Paul described the regeneration of the entire created order and then affirmed it is in this hope we were saved. In English the word hope may refer to an uncertain possibility, as in hoping our team wins or a disease is cured. The Greek word has an altogether different meaning. Paul referred to Christian hope, which has no uncertainty. It is still in the future, not fully realized; but its reality is beyond question. Our future is secure because of what God has done through Jesus Christ. This is our certain hope.

8:25. Christians are saved, as the previous verse stated, but we look forward to the full realization of the meaning of being saved. We hope for what we do not see describes the abiding mind-set of a Christian. We eagerly wait describes our yearning. The necessary strength to embrace hope and continually wait is found in the word patience. Difficult circumstances may seem to be direct evidence for either God's lack of care or lack of ability. But this is not the case. Difficult circumstances simply call for our need to endure. Endurance and victory are often precisely the same.