

The coming liberation of the creation from the effect of Adam's sin

A sermon preached by Henry Dixon
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¹⁸I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. ²⁰For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. ²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³Not 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. ²⁴For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. (Romans 8.18 – 25)

Introduction

Last week we started looking at Romans chapter 8 and verses 18 to 25. We particularly focussed on verse 18, which speaks to us about having a right attitude to our present sufferings. We saw that suffering is to be expected for the Christian. Our bodies still live with the results of Adam's fall into sin. We live in a sin-saturated world, where people behave badly and oppose Christ. We have to battle with sin in our own lives. On top of this, we have a constant battle with the devil. But we also saw that the glory that we are going to inherit is far greater than our present sufferings. We further saw that we need to learn to think in a

different way. We need to remind ourselves constantly that our present troubles are tiny in comparison with the glory that we shall inherit, and we need to learn to fix our minds on the future glory that will be ours, rather than to dwell on our present sufferings.

Today, our focus is on verses 19 to 22, which speak about the eager longing that the creation has for the glory of the children of God to be revealed. The reason for this is that the condition of creation is bound up with the condition of mankind. When mankind fell into sin, the creation was consigned to a state of frustration. But when the glory of the sons of God will be revealed, then the creation also will be set free from its frustration. It will be wonderfully renewed. We who are believers will enjoy a new creation, which will have been set free from its bondage to corruption.

This is a very important passage, because it tells us that our future hope is not that we shall live in a world of spirits, but that we shall live in a recreated physical world. Many believers do not realise this, and so can not look forward with full appreciation to the future. When we properly realise what this passage is teaching, it helps us to look ahead to the resurrection.

We can divide this passage into three sections:

1. The creation is longing for the glory of the sons of God to be revealed, verse 19.
2. The creation is in its present condition of frustration owing to the sin of Adam, verse 20.
3. The creation is going to be set free from its bondage to decay, verse 21.

1. The creation is longing for the sons of God to be revealed

The apostle says in verse 19, "The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed."

This verse is linked with verse 18, because the original Greek sentence starts with the word "for". So this verse gives the reason for, and fills out, what the apostle said in verse 18, where he said, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."

The apostle says that the creation “waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed”. What is he talking about when he speaks of the creation? The answer must be the physical world of the universe and the earth, and also all the plants and animals which live on earth. The apostle personifies the inanimate creation. It is not that the creation itself can think or speak in a literal way, but he uses a figure of speech to show how the creation is not what it is meant to be, and would, if it were able to express itself, wish that it were different.

The apostle says that the creation “waits in eager expectation”. The expression that the apostle uses here is one that would be used of a person who is in a crowd, trying to get a view of some important person coming by. Imagine a crowd at a royal wedding. Everybody is straining and trying to reach up to get the best view as the Queen’s coach the Queen goes by. That is the idea that is being spoken of here.

What is it that the creation is longing to see? The apostle says that the creation is longing for the “revelation of the sons of God”. This tells us something very important: we who are Christians are already the sons of God. Not only so, but God has already given us all things, including the glory that is to come. Later in the chapter, in verses 29 and 30, the apostle says something very remarkable. He says,

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

In these verses the apostle speaks about how, for those who are true believers, our salvation is according to the eternal purposes of God. Those he foreknew, in other words, those God loved in advance with his special love, he predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son. He pre-determined their future, that they should ultimately become like Jesus. And those God predestined, he also called, that is, summoned to receive his salvation through causing them to hear the Gospel, and moving them to believe. Those he called, he also justified, that is, he declared them to be righteous in his sight. Those he justified, he also glorified. Notice, “glorified” is in the past tense. God has already done it. He has already given his glory to his children.

This ties up with what the apostle says in Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 3: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” Notice the past tense again. God has blessed us, already, in

the heavenly realms, with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Every blessing is ours already. It is our possession.

Consider also what the apostle says in chapter 2, and verses 4 – 7. He has spoken about the dreadful condition that we were in before we were born again, but then he says,

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

We are now, spiritually speaking, raised up with Christ. We are united with Christ. Where is Christ now? In heaven. So if we are united with him, we are already, spiritually, in heaven!

The apostle also says Colossians 3 verses 1 to 4,

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

We have been raised with Christ. He is our life. He is our glory. We have been given this glory in Christ. But this glory is hidden now. Men are unaware of it. We look like ordinary human beings. But when Christ comes again, the glory that we have now as the children of God will be revealed.

That is why, in verse 18, the apostle said, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be **revealed** in us.”

The experience of glory that we shall come into when Christ comes again is spoken of in other places as something which is going to be revealed. Peter says in his first letter, chapter 1, and verses 3 to 5,

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade — kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the

coming of the salvation that is **ready to be revealed in the last time**.

He says in chapter 4 of the same letter, and verses 12 and 13,

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is **revealed**.

He also says in chapter 5 and verse 1, “To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow-elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the **glory to be revealed...**”

So what is going to happen when Jesus returns is that the glory which we have already been given in him will be revealed.

Think of a time when you have got tickets for a great show in London. You have heard reports of the magnificent set that the show has, one of the most lavish sets that have ever been produced. You are in the theatre. The curtain is down. The lights are on in the auditorium. But then, the lights fade, and the curtain goes up! You see this wonderful set that you had heard about! This is a pale reflection of what it will be like when Christ comes again. The curtain will be removed. The glory that we have in him will be revealed.

This is another reason why the true Christian should have no doubt whatsoever about his salvation in Christ. If you have been saved, God has already given you the glory which will be revealed when Christ comes again! It will never be taken from you. All that is going to happen when Christ comes back is that the glory that you already have will be revealed.

2. The reason the creation is as it is today is because of Adam's sin

We read in verse 20, “For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it”.

We learn from this verse that there was a time when the creation was free from frustration. When was this? When God first created the world, before Adam sinned. Go back to the account of creation in Genesis chapter 1. What is the refrain you hear again and again in that chapter? “And it was good”. And then, once God had finished all his

work of creation, we read, in Genesis chapter 1 and verse 31, “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.”

The work of creation was perfect. Everything worked fine. Everything was in harmony. It would seem that at this point in the history of the world that the animals were vegetarian. Certainly humans were. There was no suffering. There was no death. Life for Adam and Eve was easy. All their food was on hand in the garden. They just had to pluck fruit to eat from the garden’s many fruit trees that God had provided.

But then, the creation was “subjected to frustration”. What is this “frustration”? The Greek word in the original means “emptiness”. The King James Version translates it as “vanity”. The New King James, New American Standard Version and the English Standard Version translate it as “futility”. The word is used in Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 17, where the apostle says, “So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the **futility** of their thinking.” It is also used in Peter’s second letter, chapter 2 and verse 18, where he says that false prophets “mouth **empty**, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error.”

This world in its present state is empty, futile, and pointless. People put in huge amounts of work to build up various projects, but a short while later these are destroyed. Great empires rise and fall. Life goes round and round. Nothing ever lasts. This is described most eloquently in the book of Ecclesiastes. The whole book is about the futility of this world in its fallen state. Listen to this extract from chapter 1 and verses 3 to 9:

“Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.” What does man gain from all his labour at which he toils under the sun? Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains for ever. The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises. The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course. All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again. All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing. What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one can say, “Look! This is something new”? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time.

There is no remembrance of men of old, and even those who are yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow.

Where has this come from? The answer is, it has come from the curse which came upon this world when Adam and Eve sinned.

This is described in Genesis chapter 3 and verses 16 to 19,

To the woman he [that is, God] said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." To Adam he 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. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

The whole of creation was profoundly disrupted by Adam and Eve's sin. Eve started to experience pain in childbirth. Her relationship with her husband was distorted, and the loving headship that he exercised over her prior to the fall became a harsh and domineering tyranny. Adam started to experience toil and difficulty in work. He would encounter thorns and thistles as he farmed to produce food. He would have to eke out his living by the sweat of his brow. Then, after a few years, he would die, and go back to the dust from which he was formed. All of Adam and Eve's offspring are affected by their sin.

This verse in Romans tells us that the curse that was pronounced by God on that day affected the whole universe. Waste and decay has set in. Everything breaks. Things go wrong. Stars die. Earthquakes happen. There are tsunamis, famines, and plagues. Mosquitoes spread the malaria parasite, killing millions. There are tape worms which live in men's intestines causing them to waste away. The toxicara parasite causes blindness in children. Wasps sting us. Rats invade our homes and cause massive destruction. Nature is "red in tooth and claw" as animal fights animal for survival. All these are the results of the fall into sin.

The creation is not in this condition because of its own choice, but "because of the one who subjected it". Who is this one who subjected it? The answer is, God did. God pronounced the curse, on account of Adam's and Eve's sin. Does this mean that the suffering in this world is

God's fault? No. It is the fault of our ancestor Adam, who acted on our behalf, and in whose guilt we all share. If Adam had not rebelled against God, then this world would still be in its perfect, pre-fall state, and completely free from suffering.

We should note in passing that the teaching of this verse poses a real problem for those who believe in what is known as "theistic evolution". There are good Christian people who seek to harmonise the teaching of the Bible with the theory put forward by some scientists that all the different plants and animals have come about through a process of evolution. They say that God used the process of evolution to bring about the different species. The problem with this idea is that it entails saying that suffering and death went on for millions of years prior to mankind coming into existence. But this verse teaches us that suffering and death came into this world as a result of man's sin, and before that time there was no suffering and death in the creation.

3. The creation is going to be liberated from its bondage to decay

The apostle says in verse 21 that the creation was subjected to frustration in the hope that "the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God."

This verse tells us more about present day condition of creation. It is in "bondage to decay", or as the New American Standard Version puts it, in "slavery to corruption". Everything is always breaking down. Scientists even have a law for it. It is called the "Second law of thermodynamics".

But the creation is going to be set free from this inevitably repeating cycle of decay, despair and destruction. It is going to be restored to its pre-fall freedom from suffering. In fact, it will be restored to something better: it will share in "the glorious freedom of the children of God."

This is something which is described in the Old Testament. In Isaiah chapter 11 and verses 6 to 9 we are promised,

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put

his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Animals that had been enemies in this present creation will live together in harmony with each other and with men. Carnivorous animals will eat vegetables. There will be no harming or destroying of one another.

So we see that God is concerned with saving not just those who believe. His salvation plan is to rescue the whole of creation from the effects of the Fall. His great plan, according to the letter to the Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 10, is "to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ."

This whole of creation is going to be set free from the effects of Adam's sin. It will be totally liberated from its current emptiness and bondage to decay. All death will be banished. Things will no longer break and wear out. Everything will continue sparkling and glorious, for ever.

When will this happen? When Jesus comes again. Then the glory of the glory of the sons of God will be revealed, and the creation will be set free from the effects of the fall. As the book of Revelation says, in chapter 22 and verse 3, "No longer will there be any curse."

This has enormous implications for those of us who are believers. Our final condition is not going to be one of living as spirits in the clouds, but living in gloriously resurrected bodies in a magnificently renewed earth. It is true that after death we go to paradise. But that is not our final state. That is the intermediate state, prior to the resurrection. At the resurrection our bodies will be raised from the dead, and they will live in the wonderful new earth that God is going to make.

Some Christians are worried about the future. They love the good things of this world and feel as though they will miss them when they die. You need not worry. At the resurrection we shall enjoy a renewed earth, which will have many of the lovely pleasures which we currently enjoy, but infinitely better, because they will be completely set free from the death and destruction which spoil them at the present time, because of Adam's sin.

Conclusion

We have seen in this passage that something wonderful is coming up soon. Jesus is going to come again, and then the glory that the children of God have been given in him will be revealed. When this happens,

the whole of creation will be set free from its bondage to decay and renewed.

As I close, let me ask you this question: will you experience this glory, or will you be shut out from it? In other words, are you a true Christian, or are you still in your sins?

If there is any doubt about your salvation, I urge you to come to Christ, so that this hope that is spoken about here might be your hope.

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