

Rescued from Ourselves
Part Three: God's Gift of Invincible Hope
Romans 8.17-27

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Offering: Firm Foundation

Christ is my firm foundation, the rock on which I stand.
When all around me is shaken, I put my faith in Jesus. He will never let me down.
I've got joy in chaos, I've got peace that makes no sense.
I build my life on Jesus. He has never let me down. He won't ever let me down.

Message

Songwriter Bob Dylan once said:

In a real sense, the only thing that truly unites us is suffering, and suffering alone.
We all know loss.

All of us would agree that there is a huge gap between the sort of life we would like and the sort of life we have.

We want a life of comfort and ease, a life of freedom from pain and loss

What we experience instead is a life of financial hardship, alienation from loved ones, emotional and physical illness, addictions, losses,

There is also a huge gap between the sort of world we would want to live in and the sort of world in which we do.

We want a world in which peace and unity prevail, a world free of injustice, but ours is a world of wars and rumors of wars, of corruption and abuse of power and unjust systems, of natural disasters and floods and earthquakes and fires, of short-sighted use of natural resources and disproportionate distribution of resources, of prejudice and discrimination, of illness and death.

That gap between how things are and how we wish they were is jammed full with tears of loss, with longing, and pain, with disappointment and sadness, with fear, and anxiousness, and despair.

But for those who are followers of Christ, that gap between our lived life and our longed for life is filled with hope. That's our focus this morning – the hope that fills the gap between the painful present and the glorious future.

“There is always hope” Video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eox5XSlq_tl

We're in a series called “Rescued from Ourselves,” a study of chapters 7 and 8 in the book of Romans.

In these two chapters Paul deals with the things that make life so difficult for us as human beings, and how God has made provision for each of those challenges.

Two Sundays ago, in Romans chapter 7, we saw how, in the face of the gap between the life we know we should live and the life we actually live, in the face of the chaos of doing what we know we shouldn't, and not doing what we know we should, God gives us his son

Last Sunday, in the first part of Romans 8, we saw how, in the face of the gap between God's high and holy standard for our lives and the lives we actually live in the face of the demand of the law and our inability to meet those demands, God gives us his spirit

Next Sunday, in the last part of Romans 8, we will see how, in the face of the gap between imperfect us and our loving and holy God himself, in the face of the condemnation and accusation that comes from the evil one, and that rises up within ourselves, telling us we are disqualified from relationship with God, God gives us his love

Today, in the middle verses of Romans 8, we will see how, in the face of the gap between the life free of pain and struggle that we want to experience, and the life full of pain and struggle that we face each day, in this life of pain and longing in our fallen world, God gives us his hope.

Last week Sharon and I had the chance to go visit Corrie and John Matthew in San Diego, and then we borrowed their car and drove up the Pacific Coast Highway.

At the end of our second day, after hiking six miles around the Point Lobos Nature Reserve, we decided to a dash back across the point to try to catch the sunset – which we just barely did.

Then right afterward, as it began to get dark, we got in the car for the drive up over a winding mountain pass on our way up toward San Francisco.

Immediately the windshield in our car began to fog up. We turned the vent to defog and turned up the fan, and nothing happened. We cracked the windows and that did nothing. Only slowly did the dash begin to clear. Then, just as we started seeing some progress, the dash fan began to make a loud hammering sound. I mean loud.

The only way the clicking would stop is if I held the air recirculation button down. But the button wouldn't stay down, and as soon as I let go the windshield would begin to fog up again.

So for the next forty five minutes, driving in the dark, I alternated between holding down the recirculation button – first with my finger, then with the end of my sunglasses case, then with the end of my water bottle, and finally just with the end of my finger again – or letting go of the button and flipping the vent back off of defog, in which case the clacking would start up again in about twenty seconds, and the windshield would fog up shortly thereafter. It was an exhausting way to drive.

Eventually, the windshield cleared enough to be able to stop this nonsense, and the next day I went to a gas station and got some windshield cleaner and wiped out the inside of the windshield, which cleared up the problem.

Hope is a window we look through at the uncertainties that are out in front of us. And sometimes that window can get clouded, as the dark of night and the fog of uncertainty threaten to obscure our view. Keeping that window clear is what this passage is all about.

A simple definition of hope, at least the way the world around us uses the word, is “desiring or expecting something to happen in the future”

As Christians, in the face of that huge gap between things as we wish they were and things as they are, we face two profound temptations when it comes to our desires and expectations for the future

Our first temptation goes like this.

I have given my life to Christ.

He assures me He desires my best.

I know what is best for me, and I desire or expect my life here on this earth to satisfy my desires or expectations.

So I ask/demand/insist that God change my circumstances now, in this life, to meet my expectations and desires.

My hope is happiness on my terms now. A hope that is bound to crush us and disappoint us, because as long as it is this life, God assures us, suffering will be with us.

The second temptation, more subtle, and one we may not recognize, goes like this:

I have given my life to Christ.

He assures me He desires my best.

I know what is best for me, but I know I can't expect my life here on this earth to satisfy my desires or expectations.

So I ask/demand/insist that God fulfill my desires and expectations in the life to come.

Happiness on my terms in the life to come.

A life of joyful bliss. All my postponed desires from this life satisfied in the life to come. We'll sing all my favorite hymns and praise songs – and none of those unpleasant ones I don't like – and I'll be rid of my enemies and hardships and I'll have all the money I want and I'll live in the mountains or by the ocean and I'll get to go flying every day or fishing or bowling or shopping, and I'll see all my loved ones again, and so on – pick your favorite version of the life you've always wanted on this earth.

Happiness on my terms in the life to come. A hope that is likewise bound to disappoint us, because it makes no sense of the suffering we experience in this life as we wait for the life to come.

What this passage calls us to is another understanding of our hope altogether. It goes like this:

I have given my life to Christ
 It is for *God* to determine what is best for me. He created me. He redeemed me. He knows best.
 So I invite God to fulfill *his* desires and expectations for my life both in this life and in the life to come.

Which leads us to the jarring and exhilarating nature of New Testament hope. A hope that will never be disappointed.

It is nothing less than *the hope of glory*.

Which brings us to the start of this passage.

Open if you would to Romans chapter eight, verse 17, the last passage in the previous section. You might remember it. It ends on this hopeful and challenging note.

Romans 8.17

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*.

Here's how the New Living Translation puts the end of this passage:

We are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering.

Paul wraps up the previous section, and turns to this next section, with a radical, and if we're honest, a radically uncomfortable, idea:

Our present sufferings are connected in a significant way with our future glory. According to Paul, the hardship we are enduring now is directly connected to what we will become in the future.

Then Paul pauses with this idea and uses the next thirteen verses to open it up and explain it.

Before we follow him there, it is important that we anticipate three key themes that will weave together in this passage.

The first theme is the **will of God**, things being done according to his will or in keeping with his purposes. That theme comes up in verses 20, 27, and 28. It makes it clear that God, as our Creator, is seeking to fulfill his purposes for everything he created. It reminds us that God created human beings with a will of our own, but that his greatest desire is that our wills and his would be one – not by us insisting that God do our will, but by our relinquishing our lives to God and saying, “Your will be done.”

The second theme is the idea of the **children of God**. That theme is found here in verse 17, and also in 19, 21, 22, 23, and 29. The interesting thing to notice is that whenever Paul speaks about God’s children in this passage, he speaks of them being “revealed.” What he means is that our full family resemblance to God our Father and Christ our brother won’t be complete until history comes to a close and God ushers in the new creation.

And the third theme is this idea of the glory of God – more specifically, this amazing idea of our *sharing* in God’s glory, which is introduced here in 17. It comes up again in 21 to talk about creation as a whole, and in 18 and 30 to talk about individual children of God.

When the word *glory* is used to describe God himself, it refers to his divine majesty. It is God being revealed as the God that He is.

When the word *glory* is used to describe his creation, it refers not to something intrinsically glorious in creation, but to the way that God’s divine majesty is put on display in and in through his creation when his creation perfectly fulfills its God-given purpose. When everything in this world and everything in our lives reflects God’s design and intentions, that brings glory to *him*.

Knitting them together . . . Paul says that God’s purposes will be fulfilled in us and God’s glory will be revealed in us when . . . when what?

As we’ll see when we look at verse 29, Paul tells us that we were chosen by God for this: **to be conformed to the image of his Son**.

God’s purposes will be fulfilled in us and God’s glory will be revealed in us when we, his children, become like his son.

That's the work that God is doing in us now, through our suffering, chiseling us and sculpting us into the likeness of Jesus.

And that's the work that God will carry through to completion in the future, when Jesus comes at the close of the age and finishes his redemptive work.

Becoming like Jesus.

That is the substance of our hope.

Let's listen now to the passage and hear how these themes come together.

Romans 8.18

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

Yes, this life is painful, extraordinarily so. But the benefit far exceeds whatever cost we may endure. You can't even compare the sufferings we're experiencing in the present to the glory that will be revealed in us in the future.

Now Paul pauses. Let me show you, he says, how what God is doing in each of you individually, bringing your life in line with his will, is like what God is doing in creation as a whole.

In the next four verses, Paul describes how creation is groaning to be restored to God's original design for it.

God's Creation (19-22)

Romans 8.19

For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.

Many of you know that our daughter Molly and her husband Dylan are expecting the birth of their first child, a son, in less than two weeks.

Our son Brandon and his wife Christy are not far behind, expecting the birth of their third child, a daughter, in March.

What does expecting look like when you're about to have a child?

D-Day, due day, is the only date on your calendar.

There's only one thing on your mind. That coming child.

And everything else is seen with reference to that coming child.

Creation is expecting. There is a day coming when the children of God will make their glorious appearance.

When Jesus returns and draws human history to a close, he will usher in the new heaven and new earth, and he will complete his work of redemption in each of his followers and give us glorious new bodies.

Romans 8.20-21

For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

In these verses Paul points back to an event that took place in the dawn of creation. Genesis chapter two describes the paradise that God created for humanity, in which he himself walked, enjoying relationship with the man and woman he created.

Then in chapter three he describes humanity's mutiny, its uprising against God, and the consequences that touched every corner of the globe. Adam and Eve were ushered out of paradise, and out of God's presence, and ever since creation has been at odds with God's original design, with thorns and thistles growing where were once there was a lush garden.

Peter Kreeft says,

What happened in Eden may be hard to understand, but it makes everything else understandable.

The result?

Romans 8.22

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

How is it groaning? The headlines give us a tally every day of the earth's groans. Yes, you can still glimpse the hand of God in the beauty of creation, but the world is crying out to be put right, and once again to reflect in its every dimension the glory of its creator. It waits eagerly, longingly, for that coming day.

Now Paul shifts his focus to individual believers, and shows how we too groan in longing for God to allow the entirety of our lives to reflect his presence and purposes.

God's Children (20-30)

Romans 8.23

Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.

We too are groaning, eagerly awaiting the day when Jesus will conclude in us what Jesus began in us, and every part of our lives will show his transforming touch.

Romans 8.24-25

For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

Now we come to a Christian definition of hope.

As opposed to merely “desiring or expecting something to happen in the future,” Christian hope is *knowing* that something will happen in the future.

Hope is the patient confidence that God’s loving purposes will prevail in the end

Julian of Norwich, in her spiritual classic, *Revelations of Divine Love*, captures the posture of New Testament hope perfectly.

All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.

Romans 8.26-27

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.

In the previous section we learned that the Spirit empowers us in our struggles to live the sort of life that pleases God. Here we are told the Spirit encourages us in our weakness. As we groan under the weight of a broken world, longing to become the men and women he created us to be, he groans on our behalf, interceding *in accordance with God’s will* – that is, praying that the Father would use our circumstances in a way that fulfills his purposes in us, forming Jesus in us.

It is in that way, toward that end, that God works in all things, in the difficult and painful things as well as in the joyous and easy things – to form Jesus in us.

Romans 8.28

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

We tend to hear three parts of this verse and miss the fourth crucial part
God works for good

in all things
for those who love him

but not
and are called *according to his purpose*

It is *crucial* that we understand what it means for God to work for our good. He promises to do so according to his purposes, not according to our pleasure, according to our desire, according to our preferences, according to the way we would like things to look or like things to go, but according to what fulfills his purpose.

And that purpose he makes clear in the next passage.

Romans 8.28-29

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined – and here is that purpose – to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

God's intention is to make us little Christs, every one of us sharing a family resemblance not only with the Son of God but with each other as ones who bear his likeness.

Romans 8.30

And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Here Paul restates the will or purpose of God in our redemption.

From where we sit in the present, only three of these are finished realities. The fourth one still awaits its fulfillment. But from the perspective of God's eternal present these things are seen as completed realities.

He predestined us, choosing us to be his children.
He called us, awakening our souls and drawing us to himself.
He justified us, redeeming us from our sin and reconciling us to Himself.
And finally, one day, he will glorify us.

The glory of the creature is the glory of God reflected in the creature perfectly reflecting and fulfilling his intentions for their existence. That means making us like Jesus.

In his masterful book *Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien describes Gandalf speaking with Frodo, at Rivendell, after Frodo recovers from a wound from the Dark Lords that nearly took his life.

Said Gandalf to himself, “He is not half through yet, and to what he will come in the end [no one] can foretell. . . . He may become like a glass filled with a clear light for eyes to see that can.”

“You look splendid,” he said aloud. (*Fellowship of the Rings*, 235)

How might God be using the wounds inflicted in this fallen world as a means by which he is making us into a vessel filled with light?

All of which brings us back to where Paul began.

Romans 8.17

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.*

Romans 8.18

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

This is the demanding and dynamic nature of Christian hope.

We can be patiently confident that

Not only can I be patiently confident that one day God will complete in me what he has started, making all things new in me, so that I reflect his original design, just as he will make all things new in this world, so that it too reflects his original design

But also that God is using all that is painful and costly now toward that end, transforming us more and more into the likeness of his Son today, as Paul says in II Corinthians 3.18. “We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”

Ours is not the small hope that God would change our challenging circumstances, but the grand hope that God would change us *through* our challenging circumstances, making us more and more like Jesus, and in so doing, making us fit company for eternity.

That’s why James writes this in James chapter one:

James 1.2-4 NLT

² Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. ³ For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. ⁴ So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

Let me conclude by reading a remarkable passage from a chapter called “Counting the Cost,” in CS Lewis’ book *Mere Christianity*.

Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on; you knew those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised.

But presently he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of – throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage; but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in its Himself.

If we let him . . . He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into . . . a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly . . . His own boundless power and delight and goodness. The process will be long and in parts very painful; but that is what we are in for. Nothing less. 171-4

Christ our Hope in Life and Death

What is our hope in life and death – Christ alone

What is our only confidence. Our souls to him belong.

What will keep us to the end? The love of God in which we stand.

Linger longer.

I’ll be in the back. If we’ve not had a chance to meet yet, I’d love that opportunity.

Live a life of love. Love Jesus. Love his people. And pour out his love on this world.