

Fullness of Time: Hope in Times of Suffering

07.25.2021

The powerful words we're going to consider today

Do not change the what

Suffering happens

Our world's broken

We're broken

Today's text doesn't change that

Suffering happens

The powerful words we're going to consider today

Do not change the what

But they absolutely change the how

How do we face suffering?

How do we proceed ahead on the other side of calamity?

How do we view God and ourselves in the midst of pain?

So this passage today is all about hope

Six different times in today's text

Paul mentions hope

And hope is what's really important during hard times

And Biblical hope is far more than just wishful thinking

Biblical hope is the confident assurance that God is still on the throne

That God is still moving in our lives and in our world

Hope is powerful

I mean if you learned you had a terrible illness

And would face difficult treatments
But you also learned that after 6 months

Exactly 6 months

You'd be completely healed and whole

You could do that

It'd be a tough 6 months

But you could do it

Or if your wife moved out

And your relationship was painful

And there was a lot of mistakes and regrets

But you knew that in October she'd move back in

And you'd have the best Thanksgiving and Christmas you've ever had as a family

You could endure that

You could

Or if you're in a season of waiting

Waiting for that right man or woman to come into your life

Waiting for that wayward relationship to be healed

Waiting for the baby that you want so badly

If you knew that on X date

The waiting would be over

And all would be right

You could wait

You could do it

Hope is a powerful commodity

And it allows people to endure terrible hardship

But what do we do

Back here in reality

When we don't know how long it's going to last

And where sometimes healing doesn't come

Sometimes relationships don't get restored

Sometimes the waiting doesn't end

How do we have hope... in the midst of the brokenness?

I am so glad you asked

Read Romans 8:18

Our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us

That word "glory" is interesting

I assumed, when I looked at the root of it

That it would always refer to something eternal

Talking about Heaven & such

Like this world's hard

But hang on cause Heaven's good

It wasn't

Jesus talked about the glory of Solomon in Matthew 6

Satan offered up the glory of this world to Jesus if He'd bow down before him in Matthew 4

Glory is *sometimes* eternal

Glory is *sometimes* referring to this life

What glory is always... is good

Always good

Our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that *will be* revealed in us

God *is* working all things together for good

Maybe in this life

Maybe in the life to come

But He's always working

And it's always good

Read Romans 8:18-21

The Bible here gives us several reasons to hope

Realities we can see in this life

That are sign posts for what is coming

The first is creation itself

Creation is not what it was meant to be

Creation is groaning

Waiting to be liberated

Because of the effects of sin

Genesis tells us that when Adam & Eve disobeyed God

That the earth itself was cursed

Thorns and thistles entered the Garden of Eden

And yards and the environment and the very air we breathe has never been the same

When you witness pollution

When you witness smog

When you witness thistles growing in your yard

Without any of your help

These are signposts that things aren't as they are supposed to be

Life was not designed like this

We went to a restaurant the other day

And you know, restaurants are having a tough time

All of them are short-handed

All of them are scrambling

So we had waited a little bit

I didn't think it was out of bounds at all

But we had waited a little bit

And they were so apologetic

I don't know that their apology was necessary

But it certainly was appreciated

Because it was their way of acknowledging that they saw a problem

That I didn't have to point it out

I didn't have to complain

They saw that the way things were going

Wasn't how it was designed to be

And they were on it

They were working to fix it

Listen – when you see flaws in the beauty of this world

When you see trash alongside the road

Whenever it feels extra humid and gross

When you experience a little mosquito feeling entitled to forcibly suck the literal
lifeblood out of your body

That's not how it was supposed to be

And God here is saying

I see it

I see you

I'm on it

I'm gonna make it right

Read Romans 8:22-23

The second signpost we sense

Is in ourselves

We groan

Maybe literally when you sit down in a chair

Or bend over to play with your grandkids

I spent last week with high school students at CIY

It's a Christian conference for high school students

And we took 54... incredible students!

But we got into bed after midnight every night

And there was lots of groaning from me

We groan literally

We also groan metaphorically

When I think I can't believe I just said that!

Why did I even think that thought?

What's wrong with me?

Do you ever feel that way?

Earlier in Romans, we read this statement:

Romans 3:23 - For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

None of us keep God's holy standard
But if we're honest
That shouldn't come as a surprise
Because if I'm honest with myself
I don't even keep my own standard
How in the world can I stand before a holy God
When He can see everything that I am
And everything that I've ever done

We groan

We groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.

Read Romans 8:24-25

So our groaning isn't instantly fixed
And we have to wait patiently

That which we hope for is not here yet

So we wait

Read Romans 8:26

This is fantastic
Not only is creation groaning
Not only do we groan inwardly
But the Spirit of God Himself

Living inside of everyone who has given their life to Christ

The Spirit of God Himself

Groans

I had a guy do some painting in my house a few years ago

Normally we don't hire people to do stuff

Mostly because I'm cheap

But this guy was down on his luck

And he & had a partner who was also in a tough spot

And we needed some painting done

So we hired him

When he got done

You may not know this about me

But I'm not very meticulous

I don't just talk fast

I live fast

And so I don't even see things sometimes

Its not just that I see them and don't care

It's that I don't even see it

I mean, I don't paint at our house

Amy's like – how did you miss that entire section

Oh

So when this guy got done

There was a section that his partner had done

Let's categorize it as "poorly"

He did it poorly

It was bad enough that even I noticed it

But I hadn't hired the partner

I'd hired him

So I called the guy that I hired in

You know, the guy that I was helping out

And remember, I'm cheap

So paying somebody to do something that I can do is painful to me

So I called the guy that I hired over

And I showed him the section

And he says

I'll never forget this

He says – "Yeah, I told him that wasn't right... I told him, Andy's probably gonna catch that."

Andy did catch that

Andy wasn't pleased that YOUR PARTNER didn't see it

And Andy was even *less pleased* that you saw it and left it that way

So much so that Andy's talking in 3rd person

Listen - the Bible here is saying

You don't have to notice all the problems of this world

God sees all of those same things that you see that aren't right

In fact

God's Spirit inside of you

Is seeing things broken in Creation

And broken in you

And broken in me

That we don't even notice

And catch this

He's not just groaning about it

He's praying to God about it

It might be a good model for us to adopt

Read Romans 8:26-27

So the Spirit of God living inside of us

Doesn't just groan

Complain

Fuss

The Spirit of God living inside of us

Is praying about it

Which makes the next verse make so much more sense

Romans 8:28 says...

So Creator God in Heaven sees that things are wrong

The Spirit of God living inside of us sees that things are wrong

They're talking about it

They're working to fix it

And they're working to bring us back into alignment with God's plan for us

A plan that is good

A plan that is *always* good

Sometimes that plan comes to fruition in Heaven

Sometimes that plan comes to be here

But that plan is always good

So what's the plan?

What's the blueprint that He's working towards?

Let's look at the next verse:

Read Romans 8:29-30

For those God foreknew

That's all of us

He also predestined

He designed us

He called us

He gave us our destiny ahead of time

For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son

Our destiny is to look like Jesus

We had a guy on our whitewater rafting trip that they called River Jesus

Maybe

I thought a little more like Forrest Gump

But maybe

But that's not what we're talking about

For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son

Our destiny is to look like Jesus

Not like that

But that you would be:

Galatians 5:22-23a (NLT) - But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Loving and joy-filled

At peace

Patient and kind and good

Faithful

Gentle

In full control of yourself

That's God's destiny for you

You have been *pre*-destined

To look like this

To live like this

But I can't seem to do it

That's why I groan

That's why the Spirit of God groans

That's certainly why He prays

I can't seem to do it

I need more help

I can't do this on my own

God knows that

Look at the next verse

Read Romans 8:31-32

Listen – if God was willing to send Jesus to die on your behalf

He's not going to give up on you now

And it doesn't matter if others give up

It doesn't matter if others reject

Look at verse 33

Read Romans 8:33-34a

Don't listen to haters

But there's more

Read Romans 8:34b

Jesus is praying for us

I can have hope because I know that the world is not as it should be

And I'm not as I should be

And God's Spirit living inside of me is groaning along with me

And praying for me

And now Paul says Jesus is praying too

The doctrine of the trinity says

That God is one God

But He exists as three separate persons

God the Father – the Creator of the Universe

God the Son – Jesus, who died and rose again for our salvation

And God the Spirit – the Holy Spirit who comes to live inside us when we give our lives to Christ

Peter said:

“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” – Acts 2:38b

God comes to live in you

After He’s cleansed us of our sins to make a suitable home for His presence

So get this

This is so cool

God is the Creator

Running the universe from the throne room of Heaven

And then you have the Spirit

Coming to live inside of each of us when we accept Christ

Groaning because things aren’t right in the world

And praying to God for us

And then you have Jesus

Sitting at the right hand of God

Watching over things

Waiting for God to tell Him to come get us

And all the while

He’s praying for us too

With all of that in mind

Paul draws some natural conclusions

Read Romans 8:35

No – none of those things can

Cancer can’t

Divorce can't

Loneliness can't

Abuse can't

Nothing can separate you from the love of Christ

Read Romans 8:36-39

Bottom line: God loves us

God loves you

Jesus loves you

Enough to take nails in His hands and die for your disobedience

The Spirit loves you

Intimately living inside of you

Groaning at the effects of sin on your life and on this world

And constantly interceding on your behalf

God loves us

And that should give us great hope

Let's go back and end back where we started

What do we do

Here in reality

Where sometimes healing doesn't come

And relationships don't get restored

And the waiting doesn't end

How do you & I have hope then?

Go all the way back to verse 14

Read Romans 8:14

Because of what Jesus has done

You and I have the opportunity to be children of God

But there's a tension here

And Paul is speaking to it

We are children of Almighty God

Creator of Heaven and earth

And yet we are broken

And we live in this broken world full of pain

How do you manage that tension?

Look at verse 15

Read Romans 8:15a

God's Spirit doesn't lead you to live in fear again

Pain does

But God's Spirit doesn't

{SLOW}

When we get hurt we pull back

That's a hot stove – let me not touch it again

I let someone get close to me – and they hurt me – let me not do *that* again

I forgave someone and they took advantage of me – let me not do *that* again

God's Spirit does not lead you to live in fear again

But pain does... if you allow it to

And if you allow it to

You'll become it's slave

Reread Romans 8:15

God's not a distant tyrant
He's your dad
He's closer than your closest friend

Read Romans 8:16

You know what I'm saying is true
Something down deep tells you it's right

Read Romans 8:16-17

If I've lost you – come back
I want to make sure you catch what I'm about to say
In fact, let's put verse 17 up on the screen so that everyone's in the same spot

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*.

Three times in this verse – before the word “heirs”, “sufferings”, and “glory”

Three times Paul uses the Greek preposition *σύν* (soon)

Which means a “close, intimate fellowship”

We're going through these things... together... with God

So we're heirs – but not just heirs

We're heirs together in “close, intimate fellowship” with God

We don't just suffer

We suffer together in “close, intimate fellowship” with God

And when we do

We experience the Glory of God

God working everything together for good

But not just His glory

We experience His glory together in “close, intimate fellowship” with Him

God wants to walk with us through this life

Not just the good times

Not just when we're at our best

But also through the suffering

He loves us so much that He's not just content to love us from afar

But He sent Jesus to suffer with us

In "close, intimate fellowship"

He experienced betrayal

Experienced suffering

Even experienced death

Experienced *every* temptation just as we do without sin

We are heirs of God, in "close, intimate fellowship" with Christ

And He sent His Spirit to live inside us

To get even closer

To literally suffer with us

The Spirit in His perfection

Groaning at the sin and brokenness all around us

And all within us

And praying constantly for God's help and guidance and healing and protection and provision and sustaining power

Listen to me

Suffering is never hypothetical

Suffering is never just philosophical

Not when you're in pain
So if you're hurting today
Let me not give you a philosophical or theoretical picture

God loves you
He sees you
He sees the pain that you're in
His Spirit has been groaning along with you in that pain
And His Son has been watching too
Praying constantly for you
But for reasons we don't always fully understand
He's not snapping His fingers and making life easy
But what He is going to do
What He longs to do
Is to walk with you through it
In "close, intimate fellowship"

Your pain is leading you to fear
To pull back
To wall off
To separate and distance yourself from God and others

But the Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again – Romans 8:15

Your pain does that
But your pain is not a good leader
Your pain never died for you
Your pain will enslave you in grief and mourning and fear

Rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. – Romans 8:15

You're no longer in this alone

You have a Father in Heaven

Who adopted you at your worst

Because He loves you so dearly

You know in your gut that what I'm saying is true

I've been praying for this moment

That His Spirit would testify with your Spirit right now

Go to God in your pain

Go to God in your fear

Go to God in your deep, deep longing

He's there

He's waiting

The God of the Universe

Father, Son, Spirit

Longs to walk with you in "close, intimate fellowship"