

COMPARE THE GROANING TO THE GLORY
Survival Guide
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Romans 8:18. This focuses on the theme “Compare the Groaning and the Glory.” Romans 8:18-25 “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation of the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice but by the will of him who subjected it 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. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 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. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have we wait for it patiently.”

Someone has said that if the whole Bible were a ring and if the letter of Romans were a precious stone on that ring, then Romans 8 would be the sparkling point of the jewel. Here is a favorite chapter in the Bible for most of us. A chapter that begins with the theme “No condemnation” and ends with the theme “No separation.” And in between is the theme “No defeat.” Set backs yes. But in an ultimate sense, no defeat.

In the last half of Romans 8:18-39 to serve as a survival guide when life gets difficult. For this morning and this evening and next Sunday morning and evening I want to present to you the four principles that are in this last half of Romans 8 that helps us survive when life gets difficult.

As we head into this theme of difficulty I want to note right at the beginning that difficulty and trial and suffering are part and parcel of the Christian life. Although we have been adopted as sons or children, 8:14, and have the spirit of sonship we are not going to be papered kids in the kingdom. We are trained through discipline and hardship. As sons and daughters and co-heirs with Christ, we who will share his glory must also Paul says first share in his suffering. The sufferings which we experience derive from two sources. First our linkage with Adam and second our linkage with Christ. All of us are linked with Adam genetically. We inherited his biological structure. We inherited the spiritual legacy passed on to us. As Paul says in Romans 5:12 “Sin entered the world through one man and death through sin. And in this way death came to all men because all sinned.” We’re all headed toward death. There’s a lot of dying that occurs in our life before we hit the moment of death. Suffering and accidents an illness and financial reverses and being fired from a job and filing bankruptcy not only happens to non-Christians. It happens to Christians as well. Both Christian and non-Christian are linked to Adam.

There is however a second type of suffering which is only uniquely Christian. That occurs because of our linkage to Christ. It involves ridicule from the world and from friends because we are Christians and in many cases it will involve persecution. Paul says this in Romans 8:17 that we must suffer with Christ. Here he’s thinking of the linkage that results from being joined to Christ. Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:12 “In fact everyone who lives a godly life will be persecuted.” That didn’t say if you don’t see any persecution, you go hunt some up. But it is to say when we try to do what is right, ultimately there will be opposition to our walk and our witness.

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The New Testament never gives us any reason to assume that we will live a pain free life. Jesus explicitly says in John 16:33 “In the world you will have tribulation.” The word “tribulation” describes something that is undergoing grinding and painful pressure.

Acts 14:22 Paul and Barnabus, ministering to the new Christians in the churches that they founded on their first missionary journey, strengthened the disciple, encouraged them to remain true to the faith and said, We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.

James, the earthly brother of Jesus and an elder in the early church, writing his letter, the first thing out of his lips is this, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds.” Not *if* every once in a while you *might* face a trial. But it’s a fact that trials do occur.

Peter, the apostle, reminds us at the opening of his letter in 1:6 “Now for a little while you have to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.”

The first principle for surviving the difficult days and the principle we look at this morning is this: compare the groaning to the glory. That principle is stated in verse 18 and then amplified in 19-25. By the word “glory” Paul is lifting us out of the realm of earth and time and space into the eternal realm of God’s heaven. And saying to us a marvelous future is to break upon us. In the contemporary church especially the last few decades the church has talked very little about heaven. It’s almost like we’ve gotten gun shy about heaven. I think there’s two reasons. One, we’ve had so many pot shots from the world that has said to us, All you Christians ever talk about is heaven, pie in the sky, the sweet by and by. And you’re good for nothing down here.

I heard that criticism against the church growing up. In the last couple of decades the church has taken that criticism to heart and gotten down to the business of helping people live now. I think of any agency in society the church does a better job of helping people live now. We’re helping people apply the power of God to their life to break habits of drug addiction and chemical dependencies and alcohol addiction. We’re helping people with their personal and intrapersonal problems and family needs and societal needs. The church is involved in the here and now.

So I don’t think it’s a just criticism of Christians any more that we’re so busy getting ready for the next life we’re not doing any good in this life.

Another reason why we’ve been gun shy talking about heaven is quite frankly in Southern California we have it good. Who wants to go to heaven when you’re having so much fun here? There are some people in the audience who aren’t having very much fun. But compared to some parts of the world living here is great. You may be in the worst neighborhood in South Orange County but it’s better than the best neighborhood of some of the major cities of the world probably. I’d certain rather be living in a cramped apartment house in Santa Ana or Costa Mesa or Huntington Beach than living in the garbage dump of Sao Paulo, Brazil or some other place. We have it great in South Orange County.

Glory! Glory is waiting out there. Paul, about glory, is not talking about getting a promotion, not talking about having enough in your pension so you can retire early. He is talking about the life that is coming. Glory!

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What's this involve? It involves a personal change in our own appearance and personality. Jesus in the transfiguration talked about in the gospels was glorified. Peter says "We saw his glory, his countenance became glistening and his face shown as the sun and his garments dazzling and radiantly white." There is a glory coming to our personality. An effervescence that will stream from us as the redeemed resurrected children of God.

If I live to be a hundred, I know I won't want to be resurrected in the physical shape I am in when I'm a hundred. I don't want to be resurrected in the physical shape I'm in at 45. The Lord isn't going to resurrect you as a whizzened skin person. He's going to resurrect you when you still could run five miles and leap fences. He's going to resurrect you strong and powerful. If you're a younger person he's not going to resurrect you with all that immaturity! Something wonderful is out there that impacts our body.

Glory. Not only in terms of our personage but glory in terms of direct physical access to the Lord, to the angels, to the redeemed of all ages. In heaven you're not just going to set around on a cloud all day and play a harp and sing. You're going to have the development of your full personhood. Intellectual and spiritual and emotional. I think we're going to go on doing a lot of learning and a lot of creativity.

In the environment we'll be living it will be fabulous. John in the book of Revelation describes heaven as a city coming down out of heaven prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. The word "adorned" in the Greek is literally translated "cosmeticized." A bride cosmeticized for her husband. Beautiful.

In fact John tells us (we don't know if he intends for us to take him literally in terms of the geographical dimension or whether its symbolic.) he talks about the city coming down as a bride adorned for her husband. He says it's 1500 miles square and 1500 miles high. Whether he's talking about a cube or a pyramid, I don't know. But that's a city that would stretch from San Diego in the SW to Seattle in the northwest across International Falls, Minnesota, down in a strait line to Dallas, Texas and back to San Diego. Fifteen hundred miles square. And it's as high as it is flat – there are tiers. And in the city of the city – central park – with the River of life and lush greenery. Along the river are these remarkable trees that every month bring out a different fruit. There are so much gems and precious stones dotted around they're like sawdust. They pave the streets with gold. The scriptures mean to boggle our minds a little bit with the glory that is coming.

On top of it all there is no more sea, no tears, no death, no mourning, no crying, no pain and no night. I have occasion to perform the service for many funerals and I use that scripture – the things that are no more – from Revelation.

The first thing John says is no more is no more sea. The reason he selects that word is because he is on an island of exile and miles across the water are friends he has no access to. In that day he sees the first thing that goes down in the afterlife are barriers which separate us from people. Physical barriers, psychological barriers, emotional barriers, spiritual barriers – all down. The glory that is coming.

When we talk about it it's like going to a favorite place where we vacation and bringing home slides and trying to tell somebody with your slides what a place was like. You can't do it.

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We've had a three dimensional experience and we're trying to describe it on a flat plane. It can't be done.

The same way with glory in heaven. John admits this when he says in 1 John 3:2 "Dear friends, now we are children of God [we've got something right now. Now we have relationship. Now we are children of God.] 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."

We're to take this glory that is coming and relate it to our groaning. For our groaning cannot and must not be divorced from the coming glory. If we divorce it from the coming glory then the groaning gets too heavy to carry. But if we put the groaning on one side of the scale and put the glory on the other side of the scale Paul says the glory will always out weigh the groaning.

He says the same thing in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we're wasting away [losing our hair, our teeth, our hearing, our agility, our speed] yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles [we might argue with Paul? Light and momentary? This trouble's been hanging on so long and it's so heavy. Light and momentary compared to glory. Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us eternal glory that far outweighs them all."

"So we fix our eyes not on what is seen but what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary. But what is unseen is eternal."

I read a beautiful illustration of this principle of the coming glory. A little known incident about the life of Charles DeGaul, the late leader of France. He and his wife Yvonne were the parents of a Down's syndrome child. She was a treasure to them and at the same time a concern for them. In his political life he was very busy but regardless of what was happening in his political life he took time every day toward the close of the day to be with his wife at their child's side to spend time with her. In the evening when they would put her to bed and their baby had fallen asleep his wife would often ask, "Why couldn't she have been like the others?" The physicians predicted that when she was youth, by the time she was a young person she would die and that came to pass. There was a private graveside mass because they were Catholics. When the priest had pronounced the benediction people began to leave till finally all had left except the mother, Yvonne DeGaul. In her grief she could not pull herself away. Charles went back to her and gently touched her on the arm and said, "Come Yvonne. Did you not hear the blessing of the priest? She is now like the others." All through life her mother had said, Why can't she be like the others. In death and in glory Charles DeGaul is reminding his wife of their Christian faith. She is now like the others.

In this age Jesus said people marry and are given in marriage. They also die in this age. In this age people shiver through the night with no place to call home, find themselves deprived of human dignity, perish from loneliness. That is the way of this age. But in that age that is coming we will have freedom and joy and liberty.

While waiting for this new age Paul notes that there is groaning. He says in verses 19-25 that the groaning is going on from two sources – one, nature is groaning. And secondly, we are groaning while waiting for the glory.

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First, nature is groaning. Verses 19-22. Here Paul does a literary thing called personification where he takes an intimate thing such as nature and gives it human or personal qualities. He says to us, the creation waits in eager expectation. Waiting is a human trait. The idea of waiting in eager expectation could literally be translated creation or nature is waiting or watching with outstretched head. Or creation is craning the neck or creation is standing on its tiptoes. It had been subjected to frustration or futility. We see this in creation where man sinned, Genesis 3:17 records “Cursed is the ground because of you.” From that time on we begin to have the second law of thermodynamics – everything is winding down and dying and nature is dying and animals are dying and plants are dying. The world itself will pass away. Cursed is the ground because of you. There’s hostility and death and disease within nature itself.

Someone has personified nature as saying that in the Garden of Eden when God created the world fresh it was as fresh as the man and woman he had created – meant to live eternally. But when man sinned, death entered not only into man’s world but into the world of nature as well. Nature was caught by surprise for in that moment of creation in Eden nature resembled a bride, fully dressed for marriage. But in the very moment of marriage saw her bride groom die. So nature still stands in her aging bridal dress, her eyes full of tears. This curse against her will be reversed, Revelation 22:3 says that there will no more anything cursed.

Though nature was subjected to frustration Paul says it was subjected in hope. It is waiting its freeing moment when we have our resurrected and translated bodies. Its fate is linked to ours. It fell because of us. It will rise because of us. We go back to the language of Isaiah to pick up what God is going to do in the created order. Isaiah 11 “The wolf will lie down with the lamb. The leopard will lie down with the goat. And the calf and the lion and the yearling together. 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 in my holy mountain. And the whole earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.” Isaiah sees that in nature even the desert is going to have significant environmental changes for in Isaiah 35 he notes water shall gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool. The thirsty ground bubbling springs and in the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow.”

Near the close of his work Isaiah says to us, “You will go out in joy and led forth in peace. The mountains and the hills will burst into song before you and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.” Nature is waiting to give an ovation to the coming in of the re deemed, resurrected children of God.

The future of nature is linked to us. Paul says that this groaning in travail that nature has is a groaning that’s going to lead to something positive. To birth. The groaning therefore is not in vein.

There is much suffering which is incomprehensible both in the natural world and the human world. So much suffering has no explanation for it. But Paul puts a theological overlay on it and says, no matter what the suffering is there is something out there that is good that is going to happen. Like the travail of childbirth. There’s a difference between groaning without a purpose and groaning and having something wonderful that’s going to happen. Paul in personifying

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nature says there is going to come a liberation to nature itself. It's groaning but it will be liberated.

Then he says not only is nature groaning but we're groaning also. We groan? Yes. We who have the first fruit of the Spirit. We who are saying in our heart, "Abba, Father." The Spirit lets us call God, Abba or Daddy. We who have that liberty and privilege. We also are groaning.

It's not unspiritual to groan. Let no one tell you it is unspiritual to groan. Paul says right here, we who are the first fruit of the Spirit groan. I think we have to make a choice. God has not called us to be charismatic Christian scientists who deny the reality of pain and evil. We're not involved in that business. But we are to remember what follows the groan. Birth follows the groaning, no death. The redemption of our body is coming. Therefore Paul urges us to compare the groaning with the glory and gives us an exhortation to close this passage in verse 24-25 to remind us that in our groaning as we consider the glory that we are sustained by hope while we wait for the glory. And hope cannot be seen. If it could be seen it would not be hope. It's out there and it is coming.

Unfortunately again, in the English language, hope, like the word love, has lost lots of it's meaning because it's used so elastically to describe so many thing. I want to point out as we come to a conclusion of this passage exactly what Christian hope involves. Hope. There are people who say, I hope I win the lottery. That's why they go out and buy a lottery ticket. That's not much hope, folks. Christian hope is certainly greater than that level of hope. It's a statistical improbability.

I hope in the glory that is waiting for me. Paul says you were born in hope. That is when you gave your life to the Lord he washed you with the hope of the gospel, which we shall be like him. We shall see him as he is. There is a glory waiting for us. I hope. Not that I've got my fingers crossed and hoping that all along what I say may turn out but it only has the statistical probability of a lottery ticket. But I hope in the sense that it's surely going to happen. It has substance and quality and content. We hope. We have not yet seen it. Therefore we wait patiently for it. But it is going to come. Because of that, in the midst of our down moments we are to take moments to reflect upon the glory that is coming. And we are to compare that glory to the groaning.

I hope in the glory that is waiting for me. Paul says you were born in hope. That is when you gave your life to the Lord he washed you with the hope of the gospel, which we shall be like him. We shall see him as he is. There is a glory waiting for us – I hope. Not that I've got my fingers crossed and hoping that all along what I say may turn out but it only has the statistical probability of a lottery ticket. But I hope in the sense that it's surely going to happen. It has substance and quality and content. We hope. We have not yet seen it. Therefore we wait patiently for it. But it is going to come. Because of that, in the midst of our down moments we are to take moments to reflect upon the glory that is coming. And we are to compare that glory to the groaning.

Our Father, we are so glad as we come to you today that we have hope in the midst of our world. A hope that goes beyond this world into the life to come. Your word will give us many practical helps to dealing with struggling and suffering and adversity and depression while we're in this life. But before you give us anything methodical to deal with you lift our

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eyes and point us to eternal dimensions. You remind us that there will be a day coming down the road when in eternity we'll look back upon our life and will measure things with a different weightedness than we do now. Present suffering will not at all seem to be the great weight it is. It will be a feather compared to the glory we'll be experiencing then. It's through your word that we gain perspective on our life and gain perspective on our problems and gain perspective on our adversities. We take moments to give you thanks in advance for the glory that you have promised to each one of us. The hope that is ours because of the Lord Jesus Christ. May we not despise the glory nor forget it. For the temptation in our groaning is to forget what is coming. Help us to remember and apply to our life. For those Lord in this room who may not have a personal relationship with you and are not certain that glory is out there waiting for them. May this be a day in which their own lives opens to you personally as Lord and Savior. May they make an inward decision and an outward commitment to receive you as Lord. For those among us, brothers and sisters especially who are going through times of great grief, of illness, of adversity, of depression, of loss, of stress in relationship, we ask your special help. We ask that these words from the scripture will be a powerful incentive in dealing successfully with the problems that we are faced with. We know Lord that you are there to help us and to encourage us. We receive the strength and encouragement of the Lord. In your name, Lord Jesus, we pray. Amen.