

Helpless, But Not Hopeless

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning. If you have your Bible, please open up to Romans chapter 8, starting in verse 18 through 25.

Romans chapter 8, starting in verse 18. And hear now the word of the Lord.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we, ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

[1 : 1 5] For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Amen. That's the word of the Lord. You may be seated. And let's pray together. Father God, we thank you for your word.

We thank you for the great hope that we have in Christ. And Lord, we admit that we come many times to worship feeling hopeless when we look around at our world. When we look at our current situations, we feel like people who lack hope.

Lord, we pray that you would revive us in the hope that we have in you. Lord, that that hope would burn deeply within us. That it would carry us through with great patience to when you come to make all things new.

Lord, speak through me today. Lord, minister to the hearts of all those listening. We pray for this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, good morning once again.

[2 : 2 3] I'm really excited to be here. New City Fellowship is my home church. So those of you who maybe don't know me, I lived in Chattanooga for a while when I was in high school.

I lived down in the Atlanta area, so we'd come back up a lot to visit family and friends. And always loved worshipping here at New City. So it's a real privilege to get to bring God's word to you today.

A couple weeks ago, I was actually up here and sharing a little bit about our work with RUF, with college students. And I was talking with John Bridger. Anyone know John Bridger? And he asked, you know, I'd love to hear from you a little bit later on.

You know, what do you think the biggest challenges that college students face today? And I said, well, you know, if I was Randy Neighbors, I'd probably just look at you and say, sin. And that is true, right?

We all know deep down that our biggest challenge is sin. But I thought, okay, let me give a, you know, more nuanced answer here. Biggest challenge college students face.

[3 : 27] Well, I think it's a challenge many of us face as well. And yet it's maybe not the most immediate thing you would think of. And it's a lack of hope. I think so many people today are young people, yes.

But young, old, all stages are really feeling that lack of hope today. I was having a conversation with a good friend about 1 Corinthians 13, 13.

You know, these three things abide, faith, hope, and love. The greatest of these is love. And he was saying, you know, I think that at different times in church history, we have wrestled with different parts of that.

That, you know, the early church, the call for many Christians was to love those as they were being persecuted. The early church suffering so much under the Roman government and yet seeking to love their enemies well.

Love them into the kingdom. During the Reformation, right, we had kind of lost our sense of salvation is through faith alone and not through our works. And there was a real revival of our sense of faith.

[4 : 27] But today, I think our greatest challenge is hope. Lacking hope. Feeling hopeless. Let me ask you this question. What is causing you to lose hope today?

It doesn't take long to look around the world, to see wars in the Ukraine, to see mass shootings, to see COVID still coming back for the third, fourth time.

And we can just kind of want to give up. We can feel that sense of hopelessness. The title of my message today is Helpless, But Not Hopeless.

Helpless, But Not Hopeless. And the key truth, the thing I want you to take away from this as we go through this passage, is that because Jesus has set us free from our helpless bondage to sin, we wait eagerly for the fulfillment of our hope in the new heavens and the new earth.

I got three points today. I'll tell you them really quick. My first point is feelings of futility. Second point is resurrection hope. And final point is the benefits of groaning.

[5 : 39] So buckle up for that one. All right, but let's look at feelings of futility. The Apostle Paul is writing to the church in Rome, and he's recognizing that they're going through suffering, right?

Verse 18, For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to the glory that is to be revealed to us. For creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

For creation was subjected to futility. Thinking about that word futility. Right? I thought, man, that'll lead you to a sense of hopelessness pretty quick.

Right? When you're trying to make something work, and you're trying and trying and trying, and it feels futile. It feels like it just won't go. Have you ever had serious car problems?

And, you know, okay, you turned it off and turned it back on again. And you check the battery, and it's got gas in it. And, you know, okay, the alternator's working. And you're like, I don't know what's wrong with this car anymore.

[6 : 39] It's not working. It feels futile. You know, my pastor one time asked this question, and I thought it was a good way of thinking about how we respond to futility.

He said, How likely are you to empty the universe of meaning when you go through suffering? What I mean is, how likely are you, you know, you may be young parents.

You got that baby that won't stop crying at 3 a.m., and this is the fourth time they've gotten up already. And you're just holding that baby, and you're saying, please, God, please. Like, this feels so futile.

All the rocking and all the shushing and everything. And you just want to say, like, I give up. Everything means nothing. Clearly, the universe must be empty of meaning because of the suffering I'm experiencing here and now.

You know, we know logically that's not true. You know logically that the universe has meaning. Life has meaning. Jesus gives us purpose. And yet it's in the depth of suffering.

[7 : 41] It's when you're feeling hopeless, when the suffering has gone on and on, when that feeling of futility has grown and grown, when you start to lose that sense that anything matters anymore.

It tends to lead us to despair. Maybe you're not a young parent with a baby who wakes up at 3 a.m., but maybe you're in your later years, and your body just keeps having health issues, and you've been to all the doctors, and you've talked to all the specialists, and you've taken all the medications, and it seems like it just won't improve.

Maybe this is your third or fourth time getting COVID. It's like, why, God? Why? Maybe you've been praying and praying, and you're starting to feel like your prayers are futile.

That sense of futility grows and grows on us. And, man, the scriptures are so good. When Paul is writing to the church in Rome about their sufferings and our feeling of futility, he doesn't say, ah, just get over it.

You've got Jesus. He doesn't say, oh, come on. It's not that bad. There are people who suffer worse than you. No, that's not at all what he says. He says, yeah, you do have suffering.

[9 : 05] And, yeah, it does feel futile. That that makes sense, because this world has been subjected to sin. That there is sin and brokenness in the world that brings about violence and diseases and death.

That that should feel futile at times. That that suffering should give us pause. That we are not supposed to go through life with naivete about the serious condition of sin in this world.

And yet, Paul follows that up immediately by saying, I've got good news. The futility of this world is actually within God's hands.

That even that sense of futility at times has a purpose. That God has subjected even creation to futility to remind us to never get satisfied with this sinful world.

To say, you shouldn't feel perfectly at home here all the time. That I don't want you to get so comfortable in this broken world that you would think, we don't need Jesus to come back and fix it all.

[10 : 18] I mean, how awful would it be if after Adam and Eve ate the fruit, God said, well, I guess you just got to live with this forever. Too bad. No, he said, no, I got to get you out of the garden.

Because we need to fix the situation. This cannot go on forever. That feelings of futility will not go on forever.

And so Paul ultimately says, man, even creation itself, even the soil, even the animals, even the plants and the birds and the sky and the rain groans and cries out for the redemption from our broken and sinful condition.

From our futility. I mean, I love he mentions like later on in verse 23, right? The redemption of our bodies. I mean, come on, y'all ever, you know, you're sitting too long and you get up and like, you feel your back groaning and you're like, oh, Jesus, come back quickly.

Right? You feel it in your body that you need redemption. Not just spiritually, but physically. We see that Paul wants us to know that we are prisoners to sin.

[11 : 28] We are helpless to break free from the futility of sin apart from Christ. That title, helpless but not hopeless. I was a school teacher at a Christian school for a couple of years and I signed a student.

I read this section from St. Augustine. Tell me what his opinion is of God's grace. And he says, oh, well, Augustine is clearly saying, yeah, in our sin, we are helpless to break free.

But we are not hopeless. And I was like, man, kids these days, they're pretty smart. I tell you what, that we are not hopeless in this fallen world.

That the futility should not overwhelm us, should not overcome us. And yet, like I said, there are times we feel like that. It feels like the story of Sisyphus.

Y'all know that Greek story? Yeah? Sisyphus, he's cursed to push the rock up the hill his entire life. That's all he does is push the rock up the hill. And every time he gets close to the top, it seems like it just rolls back down.

[12 : 30] And that's his eternity. And, you know, some existentialist philosopher read that story and said, oh, yeah, like, that's not so bad. You know, it's in the midst of that futile pushing the rock up the hill that we really find our humanity.

And you got to imagine the Apostle Paul just shaking his head like, you're missing the whole point. No, that this life, yes, there is a sense of futility.

And yet, God does not plan to leave it that way. That God wants to give us, in the midst of our Sisyphean existential crises, hope of redemption.

Hope of salvation. Hope of a renewed world. Hope of a renewed body, even. That the scriptures say, yes, you are helpless to break free of that cycle on your own.

But you are not without hope. You know, I don't know where you're coming from today. Maybe you just wandered in here and you don't know maybe why you even entered church today.

[13 : 36] Maybe you don't know what you really believe. Maybe you're wondering if the hope that Christianity offers is the same kind of hope that everything else offers. You know, maybe just a few nice life rules.

Maybe a better way to budget your money. Maybe make a few more friends. But ultimately, all those things, as we know in this fallen world, can end in a moment.

And I want you to know, if you've come in here today and you don't know what you believe in, you're feeling hopeless, that what the Bible is trying to tell you is that there is a hope in something eternal.

And it's not just in a thing, it's actually in a person. That our hope as Christians is founded in the person and work of Jesus Christ. That that hope will not change.

As the book of Hebrews says, Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. That it's a hope that will not be shaken because it is in the eternal.

[14 : 36] And so, let's look at that resurrection hope, my second point. And let me ask you this question. Where do you turn to for hope? When you're feeling that sense of futility.

When your body seems to be breaking down for the tenth time. When there's more month than money. Right? Where do you turn to for hope? And it's important that we note that hope for Christians is in a person.

It's in the person of Christ. Right? It's not in getting a better job necessarily. It's not even in your baby sleeping all the way through the night. Right? It's not in the medication that will completely remove pain from you.

Nor hope is founded in Jesus. It's not the hope of so many TV shows that maybe we can finally figure out our government problems.

Our environmental problems. Or whatever problems they may be. No, it's actually the hope of the original Star Wars movies. You know, like the good ones. Remember Princess Leia saying, Obi-Wan Kenobi, you're my only hope.

[15 : 39] Her hope was in that person coming and helping her. Not Obi-Wan Kenobi, I hope you bring good Jedi values to save the universe. Right? To reform some people. No, I need this person to come and fix it.

That Jesus is the one we put our hope in. The person of Christ. And yet, right, he is not one that has fallen into sin.

He's not one that will fail us. He's not one that will leave us hanging. No, our hope in Christ is something assured because he was the one who obeyed God in every way and remained without sin.

1 Corinthians 15 actually gets even more specific. It says, our hope is not even in our own resurrection. But it's actually in the resurrection of Christ. Paul says, man, what good is it if even you're resurrected but Christ wasn't?

No, our hope is that Jesus walked out of that tomb. That unlike Sisyphus who's got to push the rock up the hill his whole life, Jesus moved the rock out of the way and walked out.

[16 : 43] That our hope is in him, in his resurrection. Psalm 42, the psalmist is in deep despair. Why are you cast down, O my soul?

And yet he says, hope in God. Not hope in, you know, nice things that God might do for me. No, my hope is in God the person. My hope is in God alone.

The good news of Jesus Christ is that our hope is not in greater personal effort, rigid discipline, but in a person. A savior who takes the burdens of our sin. A savior who actually left the throne of glory and came down and embraced a hopeless people.

Who had all the power in the world and yet experienced the helplessness of a human condition. Who experienced self-imposed limitations.

So that he could be a perfect sacrifice for his people. That this is why Jesus can be our hope, an eternal hope. I love how Romans 8 says, all right, and yes, our hope is in Christ.

[17 : 54] And he sends us the Holy Spirit. Right, verse 23. Not only the creation, but we ourselves have the first fruits of the Spirit. As we groan inwardly. As we wait eagerly for the adoption of sons.

The redemption of our bodies. For in this hope, we were saved. Paul is saying, look, yeah, Jesus came and he died for your sins and he resurrected. And that's what he put our hope in. And then Jesus says, I want you to know that I'm still with you in this broken world.

I'm still with you through my Holy Spirit. That the Spirit's presence is with us at all times. Trying to remind us and encourage us and point us back to the hope that we have in Jesus.

So many times, you know, in our, if someone put this on a board recently and I thought it was really good. If you had to like draw a line of what our sanctification looks like.

You know, you probably draw like a graph and it's kind of up and down, right? I'm trying to be a little more like Jesus every day. And it's getting closer, hopefully, to God. And yet, what so often happens is as that line kind of goes up and down, we see the cross actually shrinking.

[19 : 03] And what the Spirit does here is it reminds us, no, no, no. Our hope and our sanctification in this life is actually through the cross. It's not in a forgetting of it.

It's not in a minimizing of it. But it's in a reminder how badly we need it. If you're feeling the futility of your sin more so now than maybe you did in the past.

Well, guess what? Maybe that's the Spirit at work. Showing you, man, you need even more sanctification. The Spirit is not in the business of confirming how good you are.

But showing you how much you need Jesus. How much hope is truly in Him and in no one else. I love this quote by Charles Spurgeon.

He says, do not look to your hope, but to Christ, the source of your hope. Right? We're not, as Christians, we're not selling a, you know, just like get a good feeling of hope inside you.

[20 : 00] And, you know, it's like a muscle you can squeeze out enough hope. No, as another famous theologian said, you know, for every look at your sin where you're feeling hopelessness, take ten looks to the cross of Christ.

For every time you're feeling hopeless, you need to be reminded of what Christ has done for you even more. That is the basis of our resurrection hope.

And Jesus, He's such a kind Savior. Man, God and His providence, right? Pastor Billy already read the verse I was going to read. That Jesus says, come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.

Imagine Him saying, come to me all you who are hopeless and helpless apart from Christ. And I'm going to work you more? No, I will give you rest.

My yoke is easy and my burden is light. That the hope of Christ is one to give us joy, to give us perseverance in the long haul. That's why Paul starts to close out this passage by saying, for in this hope we were saved.

[21 : 05] Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Right? That Christ calls us to great patience in His work to redeem the world.

That yes, we have hope now, but we have hope that we will see the fullness of God's glory later on. That we are going towards an even greater glory.

And so, saints, we are called to patient perseverance in the hope of Christ. In the now, but not yet. A couple last things I want to share.

The last point here, the benefits of groaning. So, what does it look like to live as a person with hope in Christ? Let's get a little practical here, because Paul is practical. If you jump in your Bible down to verse 26, it says, Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness.

For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. Here, Paul is saying, man, there are times in the Christian life where you're going to do some groaning.

[22 : 15] And actually, the Spirit Himself is groaning on behalf of you. You know, every once in a while I hear someone say, like, you don't need to pray about it, God knows.

It's like, okay, but God tells us to pray. He tells us to cry out to Him. There's that parable, Jesus says, of the widow banging on the door of the judge all night long.

Jesus tells us that to say, be persistent in prayer. And even when you don't have the words, pray anyways. The benefits of groaning.

Well, let me tell you one aspect of that. I've got three quick sub points. First one is lamenting. You're like, hold on, Pastor Chris. I don't see the word lament anywhere in the passage.

You're right, you're right. But Dr. Kelly Capik just came out with a great book. He's at Covenant College. All about lamenting. And I thought this fits so well. He said, you know, lamenting is unique to Christians.

[23 : 13] Because it's not naivete. It's not false optimism. But it's not despair either. That's what the world offers. False optimism.

Things will just get better. I feel like it'll get better. Or despair. It'll never get better. No, it says lament is actually something unique to Christians.

Because we can say, yes, the world is broken in sin. I recognize the sinfulness. Things are not right. But we should have a sense of dissatisfaction with the way things are in this world.

And yet we also have the hope in the one who's going to come back and fix it all. And so when we lament together as Christians, we can say, look, yes, I see your hurt.

And I see your pain. And I am with you in that. I can cry with you, yes. And I can encourage you that this is not the end of it.

[24 : 12] This is not the end of your story. First Thessalonians says, we grieve, yes, but not without hope. We actually grieve with hope. That we can lament that this world is broken.

But our lament is actually a statement of faith. It's a statement of faith in the one that we are crying out to, to make all things new. My second sub point, more specifically, is to pray.

Right? Paul says, even when we pray and we don't have the words, the Spirit groans out for us. He intercedes for us on our behalf. Right? That even creation is groaning and praying for God to redeem the world.

That, you know, I found even just in the last month a couple times, finding myself praying and saying, God, I don't even know what to pray for.

You know, in this situation, I know there's something wrong here, but I don't even know what to pray. So, Spirit, intercede for me. Groan for me because I don't even have the words.

[25 : 20] That I don't know what you're going through. Maybe you feel like you can't pray. Maybe you've been praying and you feel like it's futile. Bring to God even your lack of words.

Bring to God even your groanings. Bring to God your helplessness. And be renewed in the hope of Christ. Think about the language here used in this passage is a pregnant woman giving birth.

You know, and thinking about, man, like, there's nothing that quite compares. To that kind of scene. And Paul uses it so well here that creation itself is groaning eagerly, right?

Like a woman in the pains of childbirth until now. And, you know, I had to ask my wife this because I've never given birth. So, but I was like, all right, what do you think Paul's trying to say here?

She was like, well, I'll be honest. Like, you know, in the moment, the hardest moments of giving birth, just like groaning and screaming and shouting out really at least gave me some sense of relief during the process.

[26 : 28] You know, it at least gave me a way of expressing the pain I was going through in that moment. That Paul is making a comparison here. He's saying, look, just as yes, we live in this world and we groan and we cry out and we recognize that this is not how it should be forever.

That we have the hope, just like a woman giving birth, that there will be new life one day. We go through this now, yes, because the glory to come cannot compare with our present sufferings.

We groan now, yes, but we groan to the one who is going to. We bring new life to this world. So, my final encouragement to you is remember the glory to come.

Verse 18, right, for I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. And I thought, man, what better way to close out than to be reminded of that glory.

If you have a Bible, turn to Revelation 21. Look at verses 1 through 5 with me. Verse 18, That this is the glory to which we are going to.

[28 : 20] That yes, your sufferings are real now, saints, but you are running to an even greater glory that will not compare to this present moment. I had the privilege of getting to preach on the wedding supper of the Lamb, Revelation 19 one time.

And after the service, a woman came up and said, man, you were talking about the bride coming in and using that imagery. And she's like, I just had this vision of, like, my wedding day.

You know, when I'm all dressed up, the most beautiful I've ever been. But, you know, when the doors of the back of the church opened, it wasn't my husband there, it was Jesus. And he was inviting me to come up.

And I just, I felt like I wanted to run and embrace Jesus. And I said, man, what a beautiful image of the glory we are running to. Right? Imagine that moment.

All the joy and all the beauty and everything made right. And your present sufferings will not compare to the beauty and the fullness of that moment. That we have hope that God will bring shalom.

[29 : 27] As Expression Engine sang earlier today. That God will bring fullness and completeness to this world again. In the new heavens. In the new earth. Christian hope is not a denial of sin and bad things.

But a recognition that God in his goodness has overcome sin and death. This is our hope. Which fuels our love. Moves us forward by faith. Into an ever-changing world.

Amen. Let's pray. Father God, we thank you for this good news. We thank you for your hope. We thank you that our hope is founded in Christ. And not anything else that can shift and change.

Lord, as we sang earlier. Right? That we want to build our hopes on things eternal. We want to found it on the rock of Christ. Lord, when we're feeling hopeless.

We pray that you would remind us of our foundations in you. We pray that you would draw our gaze back to the cross. Remind us all that you have done for us. To save us and give us hope that is eternal.

[30 : 28] Lord, we pray that we would represent hope. In the lost and hopeless world. Lord, that we would be a light to our community. A beacon of hope. In a sea of hopelessness.

Lord, thank you for your goodness. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.