

Romans 8:18-25

Longing

In the Name of the One who promises that he will come back and take us to be with him, that we also may be where he is,

Dear Brothers and Sisters of our Lord Jesus Christ,

“Why?” There was a time, lasting...well...definitely months, maybe even years when that was my daughter Nora’s favorite question. “Time to get in the car.” “Why?” “Because we’re going to the grocery store.” “Why?” “Because we need to get something for dinner.” “Why?” “Because we don’t have anything in fridge.” “Why?” “OK. Maybe you should just be quiet for a little while.” “Why?”

I’m happy (for my sanity’s sake) to report that she grew out of that phase and “why?” is no longer her favorite question. Now it’s “how long?” How long till we get there? How long till vacation? How long till we come home from vacation? How long till school starts? How long till winter? “OK. Maybe you should just be quiet for a little while.”

But she’s not the only one who wants to know “how long?” That’s a question we all ask. It pops up all the time throughout our lives. How long till I can retire comfortably? How long till the car is fixed? How long before that amazon order arrives? How long till our society becomes totally secular and sees no benefit in Christianity?

And when pain and heartache turn everything in our lives upside down, that’s when we really start to ask “How long?” How long do I have to live like this? How long till I can get back to normal? How long till this pain is over and done with for good? How long till Jesus comes back?

That’s the “how long?” that’s pictured in our text for today. The apostle Paul writes in Romans, chapter 8. ***“The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.”*** All creation--marred by sin, scarred by a continual decay, overflowing with destruction and sadness--all creation eagerly waits in expectation for the day of Jesus’ return. It’s like a little boy perched on his father’s shoulders as they wait along Main Street for the Fourth of July parade to come their way. He can hear the band, he can hear the fire engines, he knows its coming. So he makes himself as tall as he can, craning his neck and eagerly waiting for the moment to arrive. He knows it’s coming. He just doesn’t know when.

Paul continues, ***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 firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*** As I’m getting older, I groan a lot more than I used to. Sometimes I groan when I get up out of the chair, sometimes I groan when I sit down in the chair. And sometimes the chair groans when I sit down and get up. We groan because we are bearing up under something heavy. So what makes you groan?

Well, we might look at the world around us and that might make us groan. We might look at the people around us and they might make us groan. But it might be best for us to look inside of ourselves and admit that a lot of the groan-worthy things in our lives start from right here in our hearts.

Paul says that ***this creation is subject to frustration*** and we know that personally because this creation (our body) is so subject to frustration. There’s frustration that comes from temptations that have lurked and lassoed us not just for days or months, but for years or decades. How long am I going to keep falling for that same line from the devil? There’s frustration that

comes from seeking fulfillment in things of this world—in stuff, in sex, in alcohol, in television, in food and never, ever finding it. There's frustration in knowing that we aren't the spouses, the parents, the children, the church members, the Christians that we'd like to be. And there's the frustration that comes from knowing that we should be more frustrated about that, but we're not. And it's not just for one hour on Sundays that this frustration follows us and fights us. It's for life. How long, Lord Jesus, how long?

But you probably know that Jesus doesn't answer that question. He doesn't tell us how long till he will come back. He doesn't promise that he will keep suffering far from us while we wait for him. He doesn't promise those things. But he does promise help. And he promises hope.

It's in the verse right after our text. ***"The Spirit helps us in our weakness."*** That same little boy on Main Street may not be as energetic after the parade as he was before. It's hot, he's hungry, he's sweaty and red faced and exhausted. So the same dad who boosted that little shaver up onto his shoulders to see the parade in the first place, leaves him right there on his shoulders and carries him home.

The Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. His word and promises lift us up and carry us through pain and suffering. ***"Do not be anxious about anything. The Lord is near." "The Lord will fight for you. You need only to be still." "I am with you always to the very end of the age." those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."*** Why will they not grow weary? Why will they not grow faint? Because they're being carried! ***Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.***

He brings us help for today. He brings us hope for the future. Jesus became a human being for us. Subjected himself in a lifetime of complete humility and obedience for us. Opened his hand to the piercing nails for us. Triumphed over the grave for us. All to save us! Do you think for even a second that he would now forget about us, that he would leave his work of redemption unfinished, that he would leave us hanging? Paul says, ***"In this hope we were saved."*** Heaven is what this is all about! Heaven is coming. And nothing can change that.

Your doctor might bring you news that causes sadness and fear. But heaven is still coming.

Your children might not always make you proud. But heaven is still coming.

Your parents might not get you and might not be great examples for you. But heaven is still coming.

Your life may seem quite empty. But heaven is still coming.

Your credit card bills may be through the roof. But heaven is still coming.

Your marriage might be a daily struggle. But heaven is still coming.

Heaven is still coming. And nothing can change that. That's why with Paul we can put it all on the scale and come to the same conclusion he does. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. We don't know how long. But Lord Jesus, may it be soon. Amen.