

Theme: Heavenly Hope in Hard Times

Text: Romans 8:18-25 (EHV)

¹⁸ For I conclude that our sufferings at the present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ In fact, creation is waiting with eager longing for the sons of God to be revealed. ²⁰ For creation was subjected to futility, not by its own will, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in the hope ²¹ that even creation itself will be set free from slavery to corruption, in order to share in the glorious freedom of the children of God. ²² For we know that all of creation is groaning with birth pains right up to the present time. ²³ And not only creation, but also we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we eagerly await our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. ²⁴ Indeed, it was for this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he already sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for something we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with patient endurance.

While doing some work around the house this past week I was listening to a podcast that has as part of its weekly show something called “Good News for the Week.” The hosts then went on to highlight a man who had just received an award for his incredible act of heroism in saving a man’s life on a ski lift. After recounting this amazing story one of the hosts said jokingly, “And that’s all the good news there is for this week!” The rest of the hosts chuckled a bit.

Obviously that was meant to be a joke, but the reason that joke produced some ironic laughter is because it can feel that way at times, can’t it? Let me ask you: Looking back over the past week, did you remember reading, watching, listening to, or experiencing more “good news” or “bad news”? As we observe the world around us, as we watch and listen to news reports, as we observe our own lives and the lives of our families and loved ones it can seem like there really isn’t much “good news.”

To some extent this shouldn’t surprise us. We know that we live in a fallen world that is afflicted with sin and its devastating effects in every way. From natural disasters and diseases, political unrest, racial tensions, crimes, murders, and all-out war, to our own struggles and tragedies in our personal lives, Paul’s description in our text rings true, doesn’t it? **“For we know that all of creation is groaning with birth pains right up to the present time. ²³ And not only creation, but also we ourselves...groan” (v. 22-23).**

Now, obviously I have no idea how painful **“birth pains”** are, but I’ve been told they’re bad. (Mothers in the congregation are all shaking their heads right now). That’s the description Paul uses for how painful and agonizing this world can be for creation itself and for us. Ouch! It can make us wonder, “Is there’s any good news?”

Well, yes! Yes, There is. There is the “Good News.” The “Good News” found in Jesus and His Word. That’s what you are here for today, isn’t it? There is for us **Heavenly Hope in Hard Times**.

When we look around us, and look within us, at all the “bad news” we see it can be overwhelmingly depressing. It can make us feel like there’s no solution, no hope. No way to make a difference or turn the tide of evil and darkness that seems to be engulfing ourselves, our nation and our world. It affects us and it afflicts us, and just because we are believers in Christ, it doesn’t make us immune to it. In fact, Paul specifically is talking about believers when he says, **“And not only creation, but also we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly...” (v. 23a).** That’s a reference to believers—those who have been given the Holy Spirit.

And, to a certain degree, it is good if we are “affected” by the bad news we see and experience around us. It can stir up compassion within us and it can stir us up to speak up and take action. In this same book of Romans, Paul by God’s inspiration tells us that we should, **“Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15).** We should mourn the loss of any and every life. We should be angered when we see abuse or injustice. We should be appalled and saddened by violence, hatred, and killing.

But we are also not to be in confusion or despair. We know that the cause of all this is sin and the curse that sin brought upon both humankind and creation (see Genesis 3). We also know the cure.

The cure is found in Jesus—and only in Jesus. He is not just our perfect example of how to live and truly love God and our fellow human beings. He is our Redeemer! He is the One who saved us from our sins by His cross and gives us something to truly look forward to—a very real and certain **hope!**

Our text reminds us of this—in fact the main theme of our text is **“hope!”** Look how many times Paul uses that word in these 8 verses: 5 times! So the point Paul is making is not just that we and creation itself **“groan”** in **“birth pains,”** but that we and creation itself also eagerly await the sure and certain **hope** our final redemption and full restoration when Jesus comes again. **“For we know that all of creation is groaning with birth pains right up to the present time.”²³ And not only creation, but also we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we eagerly await our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.²⁴ Indeed, it was for this hope we were saved.” (v. 22-24a).**

If all we do is look around at all the “bad news” we see hear and experience we will be driven to depression and hopelessness, and we’ll likely just end up being paralyzed by fear. Paul, in the very first verse of our text reminds us instead to remember to “look up!” **“For I conclude that our sufferings at the present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us” (v. 18).** Wow! That is quite a statement! Because the **“sufferings”** we experience here on earth can seem so oppressive. That means the glory of heaven must be incredible! In a similar verse in 2 Corinthians, Paul reminds us of this true reality, **“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,”¹⁸ while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:17-18).**

I shared these verses from **2 Corinthians** as words of comfort last week after we heard about the passing of one of our students at our school. But let me ask you: How can Paul say these things? That **“our sufferings”** aren’t worth comparing to the glory we’ll experience in heaven, or that the **“afflictions”** of this life are **“light”**? The tragedies of this life are not “light”? Disasters and life-threatening, life-altering diseases are not “light”? Violence, brutality, war and killing are not “light”? Losing a child—or losing a loved one is not “light”? How can Paul say that? It almost sounds offensive to anyone who is going through an extremely difficult time, or is experiencing a tragedy or loss in their life!

God inspired Paul to write that our **“afflictions”** are **“light”** and **“not worth comparing”** because, first of all, they are **“but for a moment” (2 Corinthians 4:17)** and **“are temporary” (2 Corinthians 4:18).** Secondly, compared to the **“eternal weight of glory”** in heaven they are **“light”** and not even worth comparing. We need to shift our focus, as Paul says, **“we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18).**

We need to be reminded of this—*especially* when the news we see around us and in our own lives is so bad. We need to have our eyes lifted up and our minds and hearts turned toward the reality of heaven regularly. That gives us an “eager” joy (v. 23). It gives us a sure, eternal **“hope”** and **“patience” (v. 24-25).** As one Lutheran Bible scholar wrote, “We walk toward that unseen but certain world [heaven] with the

resilient steps of men whose future is so sure and great that the present burden of our secular knapsacks seems no weight at all. That is what Paul means by ‘patience,’ this waiting for God’s time with the athletic stamina of certain hope.” (Martin Franzmann, *Romans*, p. 151).

What are we going to do in the meantime while we wait? While we are still here in the midst of a painful, “groaning” creation what will we do? What do we do? Jesus again is the answer and the solution. Because Jesus is the One who changes hearts through the “Good News” of the Gospel. He is the One who inspires and empowers us with the desire (the “want to”) and the ability to do the truly good things He desires from us:

- ✚ To show compassion to those who have suffered loss.
- ✚ To give help to those who are helpless and hurting.
- ✚ To show kindness in response to hatred.
- ✚ To be a light in the midst of the darkness and be a witness for Him.
- ✚ To pray! — The verse that follows our sermon text in Romans 8 reminds us to do this very thing, and reminds us that the Holy Spirit helps us to pray with a very different type of “**groan**”—not of pain, but in pleading to our Father in heaven on our behalf: **“In the same way the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we should pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that are not expressed in words” (Romans 8:26).**

Jesus is also the One who inspires and empowers us to share His “Good News” (the Gospel) with others.

Think of the “Good News” we’re about to share this week with 22 little ones at our Vacation Bible School in Mountain View. Of those 22 children 18 who signed up are not members of our congregation. For some of these children this may be the first time they’ve heard about Jesus and how He lived, died, and rose again to save them. And for the students who do already know and believe in Jesus as their Savior, think of what an encouragement to their faith this week will be! So, whatever your involvement has been in helping with our VBS—whether it is by teaching, advertising, volunteering your time this week, helping provide snacks, meals, donations, or prayers—remember and be encouraged by the promise from our Lord from our first Scripture reading today: **“Just as the rain and the snow come down from the sky and do not return there unless they first water the earth, make it give birth, and cause it to sprout, so that it gives seed to the sower and bread to the eater, ¹¹ in the same way my word that goes out from my mouth will not return to me empty. Rather, it will accomplish whatever I please, and it will succeed in the purpose for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:10-11 EHV).**

Because of Jesus and His promises we have a sure and certain **Heavenly Hope** even in hard times—especially in hard times! We need to be reminded of this. We need Jesus and His Spirit to strengthen our faith and our hope to produce in us the patience we need to persevere. We need to hear and read for ourselves this “Good News.” We need to share this “Good News” and spread the love of Jesus with others! And so we close our sermon today with this short prayer:

Hear our prayers and our “groans” when we are in pain, dear Jesus. Heal us and help us, and comfort all those who have suffered loss. Remind us of the sure and certain heavenly hope that is ours, especially when we are facing difficult times. Come back quickly to rescue us and take us home to be with You as You have promised. We pray this in Your name as we trust in You to keep all of Your promises. Amen.