

I.N.I.

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
August 4, 2013
Romans 8:18-25

In Christ Jesus, who endured the reality of suffering for us so that we could experience the reality of eternal joy with Him, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Last week we heard the Apostle Paul declare **THERE IS THEREFORE NOW NO CONDEMNATION TO THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST JESUS...** We also mentioned last week that you could summarize this eighth chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans with these words: **We have been set free from the slavery to sin and death.**

In the verses just before our text this morning we hear Paul proclaim **FOR AS MANY AS ARE LED BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD, THESE ARE THE SONS OF GOD. FOR YOU DID NOT RECEIVE THE SPIRIT OF BONDAGE AGAIN TO FEAR, BUT YOU RECEIVED THE SPIRIT OF ADOPTION BY WHOM WE CRY OUT, "ABBA, FATHER."**

These are some powerful, confident, encouraging words...**no condemnation...set free from slavery to sin and death...no bondage again to fear.** Through the working of the Spirit in our hearts we are sons and daughters, made such through the adoption in Christ Jesus.

But let's have a little reality check here. We still see and feel the effects of sin and death in our lives. There is still suffering, sorrow, sickness, pain and death all around us and in us. We still feel fear in many situations in life.

In this section of our study, Paul is speaking to the Christian who sees and therefore feels the difference between his **status** as a child of God--redeemed and set free from the bondage of sin and death and fear--and his often painful experience of **living** in this world of sin and death and fear.

How often haven't we felt, maybe even said, "Life is just not fair. I don't get any breaks. So many things seem to go wrong for me. I fail so often and things don't turn out the way I expected them to. There is little joy in anything I do. Life stinks!" It is awfully easy to become a discouraged Christian. Well the Apostle Paul in our text this morning has:

SOME WORDS FOR DISCOURAGED CHRISTIANS

Remember that Paul first wrote these words for the believers who lived in Rome, who at this time had little persecution, had not suffered much for following Christ. But in a few years they would suffer greatly. He was preparing them for the future.

We don't know what is in store for us in America. Up to now we have had very little persecution for being a Christian, but for the one who stands uncompromisingly upon the Word things are heating up. But even without the open persecution of the unbelieving world there are more than enough things that can discourage us in our faith walk; in our faith struggle. Our first point is this:

I: THE CAUSE OF OUR DISCOURAGEMENTS

Paul writes in verses 20 & 22: **FOR THE CREATION WAS SUBJECTED TO FUTILITY, NOT WILLINGLY, BUT BECAUSE OF HIM WHO SUBJECTED IT IN HOPE... FOR WE KNOW THAT THE WHOLE CREATION GROANS AND LABORS WITH BIRTH PANGS TOGETHER UNTIL NOW.** You mothers know all about birth pangs. What was creation subjected to? Why does all of creation groan and labor as if in birth pangs? Because of **SIN!**

Paul reflects back to Genesis 3 and the fall of man into sin. All of creation has been affected because of sin, not its sin, but man's sin. The curse of sin not only affected humans--God's greatest creature, who had been created perfect in His image--but it also affected all of God's creation. Animals began to kill each other. Plants and animals died. Things began to rust and decay, rot and spoil, wear out and fall apart. Diseases and illnesses became a part of life in this world. Paul calls that **"THE BONDAGE OF CORRUPTION (or decay)."**

The ground was cursed because of sin. We see that, not only in the soil not always producing the best crops and some ground being totally worthless; but we also see it in the destruction of the ground. The mud-slides, volcanoes, earthquakes and floods that destroy and wash away good soil. The wind and sun bleach and harden the ground. Hurricanes and tornadoes strip vegetation of its leaves and fruit and uproot trees. Bugs eat and destroy trees and plants. The extremes of cold and heat adversely affect many plants. Man's pollution corrupts the water, the soil and the air. Since sin has entered into the world there is death and decay in all of nature around us.

This groaning and dying world longs for release; for redemption from all of this corruption. Paul speaks of creation as if it had the human quality of being able to feel and express itself. He says all of creation groans and labors with birth pangs. You can practically hear nature "groaning" when you witness its upheavals, destructions and calamities: The **howling** of the wind as it rushes through the trees; the train-like **roar** of the hurricane or tornado; the **rushing, roaring and splashing** sound of flood waters; the **exploding, booming** sound of volcanoes; the **eerie, deathly quiet** of a drought; the **cries and howls** of abused animals.

Paul says: **AND NOT ONLY THEY, BUT WE ALSO WHO HAVE THE FIRSTFRUITS OF THE SPIRIT, EVEN WE OURSELVES GROAN WITHIN OURSELVES...** We have this hope of the glory of Christ through the working of the Spirit in our hearts. Yet we also groan under the weight and burden and consequences of sin in our bodies, in our lives and in our world. Do you hear your bodies groan with aches and pains? Not only because of the curse of old age brought about because of sin, but because of the stress and strain of work and responsibilities.

For Adam and Eve, before sin, all work was pure joy and pleasure with no aches and pains, no worries and frustrations, no stress and strain, no accidents and injuries.

Does your spirit groan within you because of the sins you have committed? Our mind groans because of the burden of responsibilities, cares and concerns; because of our past failures and the frustrations of daily life. Our mind, body and soul are still part of this present creation, affected by sin and therefore all, to a greater or lesser degree, all suffer along with this sinful world. And because of this frustration and futility what do we sometimes do? We abuse these bodies God has given us with overindulgence. Some turn to working more and more to escape; others to drinking or drugs; others to sexual immorality; others to over-eating; others to self-abuse; and still others to worry, anxiety and despair. But there is a cure!

II: THE CURE FOR OUR DISCOURAGEMENTS

Note that Paul says **"THE WHOLE CREATION GROANS AND LABORS WITH BIRTH PANGS TOGETHER UNTIL NOW."** These birth pangs are only temporary, only for this lifetime. God's plan is that even the created world will be set free; redeemed from the effects of sin and will share in the glory of the new heavens and the new earth where righteousness dwells. That is why Paul writes in verse 19: **FOR THE EARNEST EXPECTATION OF THE CREATION EAGERLY WAITS FOR THE REVEALING OF THE SONS OF GOD.**

In this life there is no revealing of the sons of God. Believers suffer along with unbelievers. Outwardly they look no different. But on that last great Day of Judgment, when Christ comes for His own, what a difference there will be. Terror, gnashing of teeth, condemnation, eternal punishment for those who rejected Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, but perfect peace, joy, contentment and eternal life for all of those who have been led to repent of their sins, despair of themselves and look only to Jesus—for all of those who trust that He has lived and died for them and rose again for their justification, for eternal life and salvation.

This revealing of the sons of God will take place when Christ comes and separates all people: the believers from the unbelievers. When this takes place Paul says, **THE CREATION ITSELF ALSO WILL BE DELIVERED FROM THE BONDAGE OF CORRUPTION INTO THE GLORIOUS LIBERTY OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD.** For God will create a new heaven and a new earth, literally **renew** what is now extant and **recreate** it to be as it once was: perfect, undying,

unable to decay or experience death and corruption. That is why creation eagerly waits for the last day.

How about us? Paul says we too should be **EAGERLY WAITING FOR THE ADOPTION, THE REDEMPTION OF OUR BODY**. As we said, while we live in this world of evil and sin, our bodies are still part of the present creation and suffer along with it. But, we are encouraged by the promise that our bodies too, along with the rest of creation, will be set free from this bondage of sin and death.

How can we be sure of this? Paul says we **HAVE THE FIRSTFRUITS OF THE SPIRIT**. That means “the guarantee,” “the first installment.” This means the pledge, the promise. It is that first installment, the down payment for that which is to come. Paul puts it another way in his letters to the Corinthians and Ephesians. II Cor. 1:21-22; 5:5: **NOW HE WHO ESTABLISHES US WITH YOU IN CHRIST AND HAS ANOINTED US IS GOD, WHO ALSO HAS SEALED US AND GIVEN US THE SPIRIT IN OUR HEARTS AS A DEPOSIT...NOW HE WHO HAS PREPARED US FOR THIS VERY THING IS GOD, WHO ALSO HAS GIVEN US THE SPIRIT AS A GUARANTEE**. Eph. 1:13-14: **YOU WERE SEALED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT OF PROMISE, WHO IS THE GUARANTEE OF OUR INHERITANCE UNTIL THE REDEMPTION OF THE PURCHASED POSSESSION, TO THE PRAISE OF HIS GLORY**.

Another Greek word for “guarantee” is the term “engagement.” It is the pledge, the promise, the guarantee of the wedding to come. The gift of the Spirit in our hearts is the guarantee, the promise of the redemption of our bodies which is to come: the wedding banquet with the Bridegroom (Christ) and His bride (all believers).

Such is our **HOPE!** The word **hope** in the Greek means “**expectation, prospect.**” We have the sure expectation and the assured prospect of the redemption of our bodies and of this whole creation because it is based on the Word. That is the Christian’s **HOPE, ASSURANCE**--the unseen eternity! We live in this Christian expectation of something we have never seen. Paul writes in II Cor. 4:18: **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**.

The redemption of our bodies is part of that glory that will be revealed in us and that is why Paul began this section by saying in verse 18: **FOR I CONSIDER THAT THE SUFFERINGS OF THIS PRESENT TIME ARE NOT WORTHY TO BE COMPARED WITH THE GLORY WHICH SHALL BE REVEALED IN US**. Now our calling is to be patient and to endure these present sufferings, as many and as severe as they may be, with the firm confidence that these troubles are a trifling, insignificant when compared to the glory that awaits us. Paul writes in the last verse of our text: **WE EAGERLY WAIT FOR IT WITH PERSEVERANCE**. That means with endurance, with patience.

The promised glory is worth waiting for. But waiting is hard for people of the 21st Century who want instant solutions to all of their problems. Waiting is hard for people who want to and think they can solve all of their own problems. But the Lord says to us **WAIT**, wait patiently for My deliverance. Waiting may not change things, but if we wait in faith and hope, our attitude toward the trials, troubles, sufferings and sorrows of this life will certainly change. Our confident waiting is based upon God’s promises in Christ. He did not spare His own Son but delivered Him up for us all. Christ’s sacrifice on the cross for us makes all of this possible.

As you mothers know: the groaning and pain of childbirth is intense but short-lived. After that there is the joy of new life, a new baby is born. The groaning and pain of this present suffering, trials and troubles may also be very intense, almost seemingly unbearable, but it too is short-lived, only for time, not eternity.

Something new and better is about to be born. God is moving things forward, toward that eternal future glory. May we confidently say with the Psalmist even in the face of sufferings, trials, troubles, sorrow and grief: Psalm 130:1-5: **OUT OF THE DEPTHS I HAVE CRIED TO YOU, O LORD; LORD, HEAR MY VOICE! LET YOUR EARS BE ATTENTIVE TO THE VOICE OF MY SUPPLICATIONS. IF YOU, LORD, SHOULD MARK INIQUITIES, O LORD, WHO COULD STAND? BUT THERE IS FORGIVENESS WITH YOU, THAT YOU MAY BE FEARED. I WAIT FOR THE LORD, MY SOUL WAITS, AND IN HIS WORD DO I HOPE**.

Amen.