

The Spirit & Prayer: He Intercedes for You

Romans 8:18-30

1. The Groaning Creation (*waiting for our redemption*)

The last 6 months have been pretty wild haven't they:

I remember coming back from our Walcha mission feeling in a new way the impact of the drought on the community there and all across Australia.

I remember standing out the front of the hall at ALIVE last year on one Friday night as flakes of ash drifted in the sky from the devastating bushfires.

And now I just longingly remember that we could even *be* at ALIVE, as we live through a global pandemic!

The world seems to be convulsing in one crisis after another as we lurch from drought, to fires, to floods and to viruses.

And so verse 22 of Romans 8 rings particularly true for us now:

*We know that the whole creation has been **groaning** as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.*

What we see in the world is not random chaos, or the cold hard laws of nature running their course. Rather, it is the deep yearning of creation for something better. Just as the beauty of creation sings God's praises, the brokenness of creation cries out longing for restoration and renewal. Like the birth of a child, there is pain now, but life and joy to come.

Surprisingly, however, creation's desperate hope is not for *its own* restoration. Creation is waiting for us. Look again at verse 19:

For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.

The date that is circled in creation's calendar is the one when all of God's people are so utterly transformed into the likeness of Christ that there will be no doubt at all that they really are the children of God.

Verses 20 and 21 show us that creation's fate is inextricably bound up with the people of God. Just as the sin of God's first people thrust the world into futility and groaning, the righteousness of Christ, and the redemption of the church, will usher in a restored creation of freedom and glory.

2. The Groaning Church (*waiting for our redemption*)

AS we look around the world we see that Creation groans as it waits. And so do we. Verse 23.

Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we await eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.

In our youth discussion group yesterday morning someone asked a really fantastic question. It was something like:

“What about those times when instead of the Spirit’s joy we feel sad?” You could go on and ask, what about the times I don’t please God? Or what about those times when we fall back into sinful desire rather than what the Spirit desires? Or what about the times we doubt the reality of our adoption?

Perhaps you’ve had a question like that in the last two days? If you have, this passage helps you to see that you’re not crazy. There’s not something wrong with you if you grieve over your failure to live out the fullness of the Christian life. In fact, such sorrow over our sin, and a longing for something more is itself a work of the Spirit in your life.

Yes, we do experience real transformation now. We really can please God. We can rest in genuine confidence that we have life, and belong to the family of God. Yet even still, these things are just the firstfruits. The total fulfilment of those things is yet to come. There is a future ahead of us that is incomparably glorious and undeniably worth the wait.

But we do *wait*. For as we see in verse 23, we are still waiting for our *mortal bodies* to be redeemed. We actually saw this already in Romans 8 verse 10:

*If Christ in you, then **even though your body is dead because of sin** the Spirit gives life because of righteousness.*

We live our present lives in a paradox of grace. On the one hand our bodies are still doomed to death, in our bodies that are still so weak and frail. But at the very same time we have in us this new and unstoppable *life*, flowing from the resurrection life of Jesus, dwelling in our hearts by the life-giving Spirit, and destined for our own future resurrection.

We hope for that resurrections. But right now we do not have it. So we wait: eagerly, hopefully, and patiently. In the very depths of our being we ache for the fullness of what God has already begun in us. Like Creation, we *groan*.

3. The Groaning God ***(working all things towards our redemption)***

And stunningly, we are told that God groans as well. Here is the beautiful and comforting work of the Spirit for us who weep and wait in our weakness:

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.

Last week during our morning service I received this drawing from one of the children of our church. Apparently they gave it the caption: "For Jesus to Send to God." It's pretty cute, I'm sure you'd agree!

But it is also a simply brilliant description of what it means to have someone interceding for us. Just a few verses later in Romans 8 we are told that Jesus is at the right hand of God interceding for us before the Father. That's the way it works: We come to the Father, through the Son. And here, we are told that the Spirit too is an intercessor.

And that's good news! For how often are our prayers like a children's drawing? We don't know what we should draw, and when we start we don't know how to actually draw it. And once we're done what we've come up with might need quite a bit of interpretation.

How often are our prayers unformed, uninformed, confused or even compromised. And yet here we are told that the Spirit takes our meagre prayers, and carries them up into the presence of the Father and the Son. The Spirit *helps us in our weakness*, not by yelling instructions from the sideline, but by taking hold of us, lifting us up, bearing our burdens, and opening our hearts to God.

As one writer says:

There is one in heaven, the Son of God, who intercedes on our behalf, defending us from all charges that might be brought against us, guaranteeing salvation in the day of judgement. But there is also, Paul says, an intercessor 'in the heart, the Spirit of God who effectively prays to the Father on our behalf throughout the difficulties and uncertainties of our lives here on earth.

And so when we pray, our prayers do not drift unheard into the ether. Rather from the depths of our heart our inward groans are carried in a divine relay, the Spirit, the Son and the Father, hearing us and helping us in accordance with the perfect will of God.

And as we are told in verses 28-30, God's will for us is our good.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Here again is the gospel in cosmic proportions, but also incredibly close. God is sovereignly in control over all things, but also deeply concerned for you. He rules over every movement of history, and also searches *your heart*. These verses take us from eternity past to eternity future, and yet here, in this present moment God's Spirit is dwelling in you and is shaping you and transforming you and conforming you to the image of his own precious Son.

We said yesterday didn't we that there are no commands in Romans 8. But it's also true isn't it that if we grasp the truths of this chapter, if we hold onto them, and drink deeply from them, and treasure them in our hearts they will utterly transform us from the inside out.

For in everything we have seen this weekend, one thing is abundantly clear: **God is for us**. His commitment to the holiness of our lives, the transformation of our desires, the assurance of our adoption, and the effectiveness of our prayers is far greater than we realise. God's desire for us to walk in the fullness of the Christian life far outstrips our own.

And so even as we struggle and suffer in all our fragility and our failing, we *can* go on, and we really can *grow*. Yes, we groan, but only because we know that this life is not all there is. And because we know that our own strength is not all we have.

We await an incomparable glory, when we will be fully redeemed and completely conformed to the image of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And even now we live inseparably connected to the life and love of God, with God's very own Spirit dwelling in our hearts.

What, then, shall we say in response to all of these things? Well, let us give God's Word the final say, as Romans 8 continues with this very question:

What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:

*“For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”*

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.