

Sunday, June 7

Today's message came from Romans 8:18-25. Pastor Steve quickly reviewed his previous points about suffering: 1) we will suffer, 2) we share suffering with others, 3) suffering will come full circle, 4) our future is secure. Citing verse 18, he said our suffering is not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed to us.

"Verse 19 says all of creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God," said Steve, noting that in the 1950s and '60s many pastors liked to talk about the coming of the manifest sons of God—implying they were among them. "This verse does not mean there is some form of 'super Christian' waiting to be revealed," he said. "Paul was making a comparison with the groaning of childbirth and something great happening."

Talking about the birth of their oldest daughter and the pain that came with it, he said as soon as it was over, Jennifer wanted another child. All the pain was worth it because of what was on the other side. Along with all of creation, we are groaning at present because of the corruption in the world and our redemption. But what we are waiting for will be unbelievable and indescribable when we see it. The baby of eternity will be worth waiting for.

Steve then read 1 John 3:2-3, which talks about how when Jesus appears, we shall be like him and see Him as He is—pure. Discussing Romans 8:20 and creation being subjected to futility, he asked, "Who subjected it?" For the answer, he referred to Genesis 3:14-19, where God pronounced a curse on Adam and Eve for disobeying him, but also on Satan for tempting Eve.

"Child bearing was always the plan of God, but not with pain until the curse came," Steve said. "All of creation is waiting for this (revealing). It may come in our lifetime, and it may not. We should be serving God with all of our hearts and know it is coming, not speculating about when."

As to what we can look forward to, he read Revelation 21:2-4 and its description of the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven and God dwelling with His people as He wipes away every tear. There will be no death and no sin, nothing but the glory of the Son of God, revealed throughout eternity. We will rejoice and have an awareness of all He has done for us. We will celebrate what God has done, over and over again.

"That's what we are groaning for," Steve said. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all."

Sunday, June 14

Today's sermon on Romans 8:18-25 was titled "Hope and the Helper." Pointing to verse 25's note about waiting for what we hope for "with patience," Pastor Steve said we must suffer with Christ. Indeed, Christians should expect suffering as heirs of everything; it is part and parcel of a life of following Jesus.

"We live lives of ease and comfort, compared to all of history," he said. "We will eat food this afternoon that 300 years ago would have been considered extravagant. But suffering in the backdrop of eternity we're looking forward to—everything that happens now is insignificant in comparison to what God has for us in the future."

Steve said we have to trust in the Lord in the midst of suffering, pointing to verse 20, which says God subjected creation to futility. But, as verse 21 adds, it is in the hope that creation will be freed from its bondage to corruption because of Adam's sin. Genesis 3:17-19, where God pronounced suffering because of sin, marks the moment the earth was subjected to futility. Adam didn't have the power to do that, and Satan wouldn't have wanted to do anything that would glorify God.

God has a purpose, which is to glorify His people, Steve said. He told Eve in verse 15 that He would put enmity between her offspring and Satan, and that while the devil would bruise his heel the Savior would crush the devil's head.

Here, he shared a testimony from his early days in ministry, as an intern. When the pastor told him he would be preaching on a Sunday night, Steve said he was both excited and terrified. He was excited to prove he could it, but also terrified he would mess it up. At this time he was subject to depression and anxiety, which he called "demonic" because of his fear of committing the unpardonable sin. The devil increased the anxiety by making him think Satan could force him to do it.

"I had a hopelessness that I wouldn't get it right and there was nothing I could do about it," Steve said. "But I heard in my heart the Lord saying, 'You have been conditioned to be disappointed, but hope does not disappoint.'" That comes from Romans 5:5, and it convinced him: "I knew I needed to preach on hope. Hope means we know something is coming. We have hope of a new heaven and a new earth."

We also have the hope of adoption into a new family, he added. The reason for our groaning is because we have the Holy Spirit and long to see the days of a new heaven and a new earth.

Sunday, June 21

Pastor Steve's Father's Day message came from Romans 8:26-28 and its mention of the Holy Spirit helping us to pray by interceding with "groanings too deep for words." All of the verses in Romans 8 are arranged like classical music, reaching a crescendo with the description of the Holy Spirit's prayer.

"(God) has been talking to us from the beginning," Steve said. "There's no condemnation. The work of the Holy Spirit is all over the place in you. He's trying out, 'Abba, Father.' He's at work and is secured and sealed. He's giving you an earnest money down payment (on heaven)."

He noted that we spent the last three weeks talking about suffering, which is guaranteed with our inheritance in Christ. We define suffering in a number of ways, but most of us have never suffered the persecution described in the New Testament. We also talked about creation groaning within itself because it has been subjected to futility by God. We groan because of the sin that surrounds us, leaving us looking forward to the redemption of our bodies.

Steve said we talked about this in Sunday school—how as Christians our taste buds are not for sin, but for God and His holiness. Growth in Christ means the taste buds that desire the things of God begin to take over our lives. We are being released from temptation and the bondage of sin. And yet, while we look forward to the hope of heaven, we struggle to live holy lives.

“The very first thing I would like to acknowledge is that weakness seems to be universal,” he said. “It’s just assumed. The Spirit helps us in our weakness ... Some of you are weaker in different areas than other people. Everybody has their issues. ... (Paul) narrows it down a bit because he goes on to say, ‘For we do not know how to pray as we ought.’”

Fathers in particular can struggle with confidence in prayer; it’s easy for a man to think he does the work and his wife is the spiritual one who gets weepy over Amazing Grace. A lot of men feel as spiritual as a doorknob, so they put their heads down, go to work and provide for their families, going on autopilot for 70 years. However, because of that, Steve sees verse 26 as incredibly helpful.

“Dad, He helps us in our weakness,” he said of the Holy Spirit. “Specifically, we do not know what to pray for. ... I have all the same struggles and problems (men do). My wife is more spiritual than me—the pastor. So when I see this verse about weakness, I am encouraged that God knows I’m weak.”

Sunday, June 28

“The Spirit Prays” came from Romans 8:26-27. Pastor Steve called it his “selah” sermon—a term meaning “stop and think about that.”

“You’ll never plunge the depths of what God is saying,” Steve said. “Jesus said, ‘I am sending you the Holy Spirit and He will teach you all things. God gives us understanding we don’t have.’ After reading verse 26, he added, ‘The Holy Spirit is God and He lives in your heart. You are born of the Spirit—selah.’”

The Spirit of God is praying for us and making intercession with groanings too deep for words. We are trapped in a world that is subject to sin; Steve asked if the Holy Spirit is groaning because of that. Or, is Paul saying he is groaning because he doesn’t know how to pray and the Spirit is helping him?

Whichever it is, the Spirit is coming into our hearts and presenting these thoughts before the Father. The Son of God is praying for us too, another “selah” moment. We often pray for things we need or want, but Steve asked, “How many of you are glad you didn’t get what you prayed for five ago?”

“Sighing and groaning is connected to our weakness,” he said. “Sometimes we’re acutely aware of the Spirit’s work, and sometimes we’re not. Groaning could include speaking with the gift of tongues. God could use it in that kind of prayer.”

Steve said the point is that the Spirit of God helps us in our weakness, and when we don’t know how we should pray. Verse 27 amplifies this idea, that it is not the Spirit searching the heart, but God the Father. Here, he reviewed a series of verses, like 1 Chronicles 28:9, Proverbs 15:11, and Jeremiah 17:9-10, which talk about God searching or testing the heart.

The Hebrew people were familiar with such searching and testing, he said. The heart has a purpose according to what it is set on, whether that is the Spirit or the flesh. The Father knows a mind set on the Spirit, and the Spirit is interceding for those who want to walk according to Him.

“God is praying for (our) good,” Steve said. “God is not leaving people on their own. All that God does for us is an act of grace. All the commandments that He knows that are hard to do: He will help us. Your life will be spend putting to death the deeds of

the flesh. But if you think you are in charge of the process you will be frustrated. It's because of God. He changes the heart."