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Series: Romans: The Just Shall Live by Faith
Message: Groaning and Glory

Transcribed Message
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Romans 8:22-25

There is a Christian band that goes by the name Building 429. I see a lot of you are familiar with them. Building 429. Evidently, they take their name from Ephesians chapter 4 verse 29 where it talks about building each other up. They have a song that is entitled "Where I Belong". The verse goes like this: "All I know is I'm not home yet. This is not where I belong. Take this world and give me Jesus. This is not where I belong. When the walls are falling down on me and when I'm lost in the current of the raging sea, I have this blessed assurance holding me. All I know is I'm not home yet." As far as I know, the apostle Paul was never part of a Christian rock band, but I know this much. He would agree with the theology of this group and of this song. In fact, as we come again to Romans chapter 8 verse 22 to 25, we could probably have entitled this lesson this morning "This Isn't Where I Belong". This isn't our home. This isn't our final destination. What Paul reminds us of in these verses is our best life is not now. It is not even close. Our best life is yet to come and it transcends all explanation.

A quick review of what we've been looking at in this 8th chapter of Romans which has sometimes been referred to as the greatest chapter in the Bible and the greatest book in the Bible. We won't debate that this morning, but in section 17 to 39, in this section of verses that we've been looking at now for a number of weeks, Paul has been dealing with this matter of suffering. In doing so, it seems to me there's two great themes that he brings forward. The first one simply has to do with giving us a Biblical doctrine of suffering. Giving us a Biblical perspective. Something that we can hang our hats on when we get into these difficult and challenging times. In verse 17 in the midst of this chapter in which he's been talking about the assurance of our salvation and the greatness of our salvation, he steps into this matter of suffering. It may have surprised us as we noted before. But if you don't have a doctrine of suffering, when you do come into those situations, and life is definitely going to bring them to us, then we might be

under the impression that this is our best life. Yet the Word of God tells us clearly that's not the case.

This morning Paul gives us yet another addition to this wonderful Biblical doctrine of suffering that he is developing for us. In the midst of this, secondly, the one who was with us all the way through this is none less than the Holy Spirit of God. The 8th chapter of Romans has often been referred to as the Holy Spirit chapter in the Bible because this is the one chapter in the Bible that has more references to the Holy Spirit than any other chapter in all of Scripture. It rightly can be seen as the Holy Spirit chapter. The one that Jesus called the comforter. The one who Jesus said will be another comforter, just like I have comforted you, I'm going to give you another one. Here in this understanding of what it means to have a Biblical doctrine of suffering, we had this wonderfully encouraging word that the Holy Spirit of God walks through this with us every step of the way. How encouraging is that!

This morning we look at the redemption of our bodies. The redemption of our bodies. Last week if you were with us, we saw the redemption of creation. Verse 22 we could've gone either way. We could have added it on to last week or we could use it as a transition into this week and that's what I've chosen to do. What we see first of all here is Paul wrapping up this creation side of it and he says to us first of all that creation is groaning. Creation is groaning. Verse 22: "For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now."

When you read verses 22 to 25, there are two words that jump out at you in that section of verses. The first one is this word "groaning". He is going to mention it three times. He's going to mention it again in our study, Lord willing, next Sunday when he talks about the Holy Spirit's ministry. Groaning is a part of these verses. The other word that jumps out is the word "hope" that we'll look at in just a little bit. It's used five times in these verses so it's really about groaning and hope. It's about groaning and about glory. That's what we're looking at.

The first thing that Paul wants us to see is the universal scope of this idea that creation is somehow groaning. He gives that to us when he speaks of the universal nature of it when he says "we know". Look at that 23rd verse. "For we know that the whole creation has been groaning." In other words, we can see it. It's common

knowledge. This isn't a secret. This isn't a mystery. It's not hidden from us. We know it. We see it. That was the point of verse 21 when he talked about the fact that creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. The created order is under, we noted last week, the curse of sin. When Adam and Eve fell in the garden and rebelled against God, something cataclysmic happened. Something dramatic took place. There was an impact and effect of sin Paul is saying that is universal in its scope. We know it. We see it every day. Creation bears witness to the fact that something is out of order. Something is out of place. We call this the law of entropy. It's the second law of thermodynamics.

The law of entropy and the second law of thermodynamics says energy is always in the state of dissipation. It is winding down. Our world is not moving towards order. It's moving towards chaos. There is a dissipation that is taking place every day throughout God's created order. There's decline. There's disorder. This explains why when you go in your children's room you see the law of entropy everywhere. We know it. Teenagers, here's an opportunity for you to step into this conversation with your parents and just say, mom and dad, it's not my fault. It's the law of entropy. There's disorder all around me all the time ... and don't tell them that I told you to say that though. That is what he is speaking of here.

Listen. This is the point that he is making to us. Life reveals it to us. It unfolds before us but here's the key. It's only the Bible that explains it. It's only a Biblical worldview that is able to understand it and speak to it. Everybody else is trying to think of other ways to describe and to figure out why this world is in the state and order that it is. They're coming up with all kinds of ideas, none of which fit the reality of the life that we live. but we know it. We see it. The Bible explains it. It is universal in scope.

Notice secondly, there is a historical span to this disorder, to this entropy. At the end of that verse he says it is until now. In other words, we can understand that to be it's right up until today. What we just said is from Genesis 3 on. When God pronounces judgment on the world because of sin, it wasn't limited to just Adam and Eve and all of their progeny. It impacted and affected all of creation. Everything universal in its extent was impacted by sin and by the fall. Now he steps into this matter of from that moment

of time of disobedience on the part of Adam and Eve up until May 16, 2021. Until now there is this historical evidence that is universal in its scope.

Now look at the next thing he says. He speaks of the intensity of it all. The intensity of it all. What picture does Paul use to speak of the intensity of all of this? He uses the imagery of childbirth. Remember back in verse 19 when we talked about this matter of personification. When Scripture said something that is inanimate and not alive, or something that is not human in its characteristics and gives them some form of life and activity that is reflective of what we do, it is personification. In that 19th verse remember he used personification to say that creation is longing. It is longing to be released from this judgment of sin. This burdensome impact that sin has had. We don't think about it but every day creation is aching, waiting for the impact of sin to be lifted so that it can go back to its perfect, created order. So there it was creation is eagerly longing. Now here the personification is childbirth pains. Here is the idea of giving birth to something.

Bonnie and I have four children, so I think I know something about childbirth. About half of you mocked me at that point but yes, it is true that we had four children. And yes, it is true that I didn't experience it in the same way. Trust me. But here's what I do know. I do know that it is incredibly intense. I do know that it is very painful. I do know that I do not want to go through that experience. When our four kids were born, there was this thing going on when birthing moms just went totally natural. Bonnie was all in on that for all four of our children. She had no saddle blocks. She had no epidurals. She didn't even get a Tylenol. She just pushed through this whole thing and of course I was the coach. You know in Lamaze the guy, the dad, becomes the coach. So I would have to get down in her face and help her breathe through these contractions, and she called into question my heritage and my family lineage. When Mary was born, we (we? Yes, we...) went through 18 hours of labor. We would fall asleep and wake up to the contractions, or maybe it was more like Bonnie would nudge me and I would wake up, and start it all over again. But that's what Paul pulls out here to say to us. Creation is experiencing this kind of intensity, this kind of picture that at least half of us can relate to very personally. He says it groans.

But here's the thing. These are not groans of despair. These are not groans that are meaningless. The groans of childbirth are that there is the assurance and the hope of something that is coming. It is to be understood as what Jesus said in Matthew 24 when the Jewish people would talk about their sufferings waiting for the Messiah to come. Jesus in Matthew 24:8 talked about the pangs of childbirth. There's that linking even in the idea that our Lord speaks of about the waiting for the coming Messiah. But the creation is groaning and the groaning is this frustration is ultimately going to lead to fulfillment. The corruption that creation is under is going to give birth to newness of life. The pain that sin has implanted upon all of God's created order is going to be removed and there's going to be joy. There's this transition that he is talking about here, this picture that he gives to us of creation groaning.

But it isn't just creation. There are Christians who are groaning as well. What he's going to do in these next couple of verses is speak to this matter of Christians groaning in a couple of different ways. The first way in verse 23 is groaning at the prospect of the future. What does that future hold? That future actually holds perfection. Look with me at verse 23: "...and not only the creation but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." Before we even get into the meat of this verse I want you to see first of all that we can be honest as Christ followers, as those who have a Biblical worldview. I think that's what Paul set forth here beginning of this 23rd verse is that we can be honest. We can be honest about the undeniable presence of suffering in this world. We can be honest about the fact that something is wrong. Something is amiss. Something isn't right. Why do you suppose Paul comes again to speak to us in this way and say to us that this is something that we know? This is something that we can be honest about and step into.

I think first of all when he says "but we ourselves". He's laying claim to this. You and I and he from his vantage point because of what we said earlier. When you jump into this 8th chapter and you engage in the beauty and the glory of this gospel, and if this 8th chapter of Romans in the greatest book in the Bible perhaps and the greatest chapter and you began at the first verse and it says there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. There is a collective hallelujah and

praise the Lord because now literally we can say there is nothing that can ever come between us and God. Period. That's His promise. There is no condemnation. Not just a little bit. There is no condemnation. Step into the glory of the gospel and you begin to start thinking that this life is as good as it gets. This is the best life now.

Then you get to verse 17 and then all of the sudden we have that uncomfortable and unwelcome word "suffering" that enters into this glorious chapter. It seems to me that Paul comes back to remind us again that this glorious life-change that we've experienced, this truth that our sins are forgiven, this idea that there's just no condemnation, we just might want to say suffering is over. It's behind us. I guess my best life is right now in front of me. Then, when suffering and hardship and hard things comes, and that's where we're living. There's a lot of bad things going on all over the world. And, if you don't have a Biblical doctrine of suffering, you have one destiny that you're going to realize, and that is despair. You're going to end up disillusioned. Enough Christians get there because they don't have a Biblical doctrine of suffering even though if we're faithful to the Word it's teaching that comes to us repeatedly. Hence, again the warning that this is not our best life. It isn't even close.

This life isn't for the Christian about health, wealth and prosperity. I'm sorry. It's a false gospel that is being taught all over the place but it isn't true of the text. God does not promise us health, wealth and prosperity. In fact, He promises us almost the opposite of that in some respects. Abundant life, of course, can be lived in the power of the Spirit even in the midst of the hardest times. But hard times there will be. Jesus said in this world you will have trouble. I just look at this again and I just say, Paul, thank you for reminding us that we ourselves know this, and yes, we do need to be reminded of it often.

It seems to me the other thing that he says here about this matter of suffering is to say to us that he doesn't want us to become accustomed to the sufferings of our world. He does not want us to have a hardened heart against the cries of despair that ring out from our world. He doesn't want us to become apathetic and cynical about what is happening in the world that we live in. My friend, it is just as easy to go down that path as it is another. It seems to me Paul is saying, listen, there's a lot of brokenness in our world. We need to hear it. We need to be praying that God will make sure our ears

are attentive to the cries of those who need help, to those who are suffering, to those who are disadvantaged and who have less than we do. Ask God to open our ears.

Here's what Ray Steadman said: "Our lives consist of groans. We groan because of the ravages that sin makes in our lives and the lives of those we love. We groan because we see possibilities that are not being embraced. We groan because we see gifted people who are wasting their lives and we would love to see something better happen. We groan in disappointment, in bereavement, in sorrow. We groan physically in our pain and our limitations. Life consists of a great deal of groaning." Don't ever get used to it to the point that you turn it off and you don't hear it. Because Paul says right here we ourselves hear this and we know this, but what do we turn to in the midst of that?

Three things that we're groaning about. We groan first of all for our future inheritance. We groan for our future inheritance. This word "groan" which is seen three times in these verses is the idea of to sigh inwardly. That doesn't mean you don't sigh outwardly, because we all do that too, but this idea is more of the inward sense that there's a burden that we're walking through and under and experiencing. It's the same word used by Stephen in Acts 7 when he stood before the Sanhedrin and he was talking about the children of Israel's experience in Egypt. He talked about the fact that they were groaning and he uses this word. They got up every day. They were in bondage. They were in slavery. They had no future. They got up every day and there was an inward groan in their spirit. There was a sense of brokenness. That's what he's talking about here. We're groaning in anticipation of something. Our future inheritance.

Do you notice that he talks about the first fruits of the Spirit? We are some who have the first fruits of the Spirit. That picture of the first fruits, I know you're familiar with it, is from the Old Testament. Leviticus 23 and other places talk about when the farmer would get to the point where the crop is about to be harvested. He would go out into his field and he would cut a sheaf, something he could handle in his hand. He would cut down some grain and he would bring it to the priest before the Lord and he would literally wave it as a thank offering. What he was doing is he was basically saying there's more to come. God, I'm here with my first fruits. This is the first thing I've harvested. I'm bringing it in thanksgiving to you, but as I do that I know there's more to

come. What is that? That's an expression of faith. That is an understanding that what's out in that field is not yet in the barn, but he's stepping out in faith and saying, God, You've given me some evidence that there's more to come.

Who is the first fruit? The Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the first fruit. The Holy Spirit is the one who is our first fruit. We might think of it like a guy giving a girl a ring to get married. She gets that ring and it's a promise that there's more to come. Like all excited couples, they begin to count what's going to happen on that special day that they're looking forward to. That ring signifies it is coming. You don't hear of a lady getting a ring and then saying, this is all I need. Thanks. No, she loves this man. She's excited because this is a promise of something more to come. A wedding and a marriage. So the Holy Spirit is the first fruit.

Here's the other picture that Paul gives us of the Holy Spirit. It's very similar but different. In Ephesians 1:13 Paul talks about the Holy Spirit as a pledge, as a seal. The Father has given us the Spirit and He has sealed us until the day of redemption. That feels like a guarantee. That's what this is. First fruits. There's more to come. He does the same thing in a couple of places in 2 Corinthians where he relates this idea of the Holy Spirit having been given to us, but there's so much more to come. The moment you put your faith and trust in Christ as your Savior, the Holy Spirit of God comes to live within you. There's no waiting. There's no pleading. There's nothing you have to do. The Bible says that when you trust Christ, you receive the Holy Spirit. That's what we read back in the 15th verse. We have the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God's seal to us of this salvation. But, it is also a reminder that there's a lot more to come. We have the Spirit as a pledge because God says there's more to come.

Notice the second thing. We groan because we're looking forward to this realized adoption. Look at the text. We groan inwardly because we're waiting eagerly for this adoption as sons. For those of you who have been here in the study of Romans, you might read that verse and you say, wait a minute. We've already been adopted. We studied that way back in the 15th verse. We've been adopted. We've been brought into the family of God. We're God's children. We've had that assurance. We stepped into that incredible doctrine of adoption. And now he seems to be saying we're growing, waiting for adoption. Which one is it, Paul? Both/and. It's both/and. This matter of

adoption is something that the Bible speaks of in two different phases. Yes, when you trusted Christ you received the Holy Spirit. You were adopted. You were brought into the family. Nothing is going to change that. You're a part. You're God's child forever. You are His child by faith in Christ. That's not going to change. That's Romans 8:1.

Phase 2 is what is in view here. Phase 2 is a future aspect of our adoption. Within the Greek and Roman culture and custom, adoption often would express itself in two different ways. When the child was first brought into the family they were adopted legally and brought into the family. When that child would reach adulthood, there would be another ceremony and that was the celebration of them entering into adulthood and receiving all of the privileges of an adult within that family. I think that's what Paul is speaking of here. It's almost like a bar mitzvah in Jewish culture when a child reaches a certain age and they have the celebration and the child is recognized as being an adult. So the point is again that we're groaning because there's more to come.

Now look at the last one. There's a third aspect of this groaning and it is for our final redemption. Our final redemption. He's talking about the fact that we are looking forward to, groaning, awaiting the redemption of our bodies. What is he looking forward to there? He's looking forward to resurrection. Resurrection is the foundation stone of all New Testament doctrine and theology. That's why the doctrine of the resurrection is constantly under attack. That's why every year when we get close to Resurrection Easter that somebody feels compelled to offer some argument for why Jesus didn't rise from the dead and splash it all over the Internet to try to undermine the most important doctrine of New Testament theology. The fact that Jesus rose from the dead. If you can take away that one thing you've got nothing left. That's the uniqueness of our Christian faith – that we have a Savior who is alive. Every religion has somebody that they follow. But all of those other leaders are literally still in the grave. Jesus alone was raised. He is speaking to that here. That's why Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 If Christ has not been raised from the dead, we are of all people most miserable. He said we are of all people to be pitied more than anybody else. That's what he's talking about.

Do you ever wonder what your resurrection body is going to be like? We know it's going to be better than this one, right? If you're young, you might be more content with the body you have. You're not groaning. But for the rest of us that are a little further

down that road, we are aware of the fact that there's got to be something better in this new resurrection body. That's the promise of Scripture. This new and glorious body that the Bible describes unlike anything that we can imagine. That's why we groan, waiting for that glorified resurrected body. One little clue or insight as to what it's going to be like is just to read in the gospel accounts what happened to Jesus. After Jesus was raised from the dead, the gospel writers give us a little bit of a picture, a glimpse of what life was like for our Lord. In one really cool incident in John 20, He's on the beach waiting for the disciples to come in. He's got a fire going. This is our Lord in His resurrected state. It's not some ethereal, white, misty, sitting on a cloud, playing the harp type of picture. It's a man who's on the beach, making a fire, and cooking some fish when they bring them to Him, and then they share in breakfast together. They recognize Him. So often when a loved one dies, especially a spouse of someone who's been married for many years, I am often asked, "Will I know my spouse? Will I recognize her?" Yes! Here's the resurrected Lord and they knew it was Him. There's a similarity physically at least in terms of our appearance, even with this glorified body. Jesus also walked in and out of rooms and buildings without utilizing the door. I don't know all that means, but I know this.

When I go back to the Garden of Eden and I think of the glory of what that created world would have been like, we have a little snapshot. Adam and Eve weren't just sitting around playing harps. They were engaged in life. It may have been a short time because they yielded to the serpent pretty quickly, but the reality is they were enjoying God's created world and order. I think we're going to do the same thing. You think that going to see incredible, majestic sights of our created planet are amazing and fun now? I can't imagine what it will be like to do that all through the glories of eternity, interacting and sharing life together in these glorified bodies that we are awaiting, the redemption of our body. Paul gives us a glimpse of that in 1 Corinthians 15:50. I've read that passage so many times as we've stood in the cemetery at a graveside, and spoken of the glory of this perishable body putting on that which is imperishable. This mortal body must put on immortality. Death will be conquered. Sin will be no more. That's the picture that we have of this redeemed, glorified body, that we are groaning in anticipation and looking forward the future.

Now, look at this last picture. Now he says this hope in the present. So when we think about the future, there's a perfect world that is awaiting us. When we think about the present, there's this endurance that the Word, the truth of God's Word creates within us. Look here at verse 24. There is a hoped-for salvation. A hoped-for salvation. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what he sees? John Stott says this 24th verse speaks of the fact that we're half-saved. He's talking about hope with regard to salvation. The word, let me explain that a little bit, because I think I understand what he's saying. This word hope which is used 4 times here in these verses. It's one of the great words of the faith, isn't it? Titus 2:13. There's this blessed hope, this marvelous hope that we have with regard to the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. So that's a hope that we have in Christ's return. Colossians 1:27. Christ in you, the hope of glory. 1 Corinthians 13:13 "Now of these three, faith, hope and love..." So hope is one of these great words of the Christian faith, and it has to do with our attitude.

But it has more to do than just with our attitude. It has to do with the content of what our hope is in. This is not an uncertain hope. A Biblical hope is not a "I sure hope this works out". A Biblical hope is a certainty. It's a confidence. We are pressing into the promises of God that we know we can rely on. The salvation that is in view here is this future aspect of our salvation. So, if someone were to ask, "Are you saved?" Do you really want to mess with them? You could say: I have been saved. I have been saved in the past from the penalty of sin. I am being saved right now in the present. I am being saved from the very power of sin at work in my life. And yet, I anticipate a future salvation in which I'm going to be saved from the very presence of sin. So all that is involved here. We are thinking in terms of the fact that our salvation also has an aspect that is yet future when we will be saved even from the very presence of sin.

It's kind of like traveling with your kids. What is the repeated question? Are we there yet? At some point you could say no, we're not there yet, but we are closer than we were the last time you asked. That's what he is saying to us here. Are we there yet? Have we been saved? Yes, we've been saved in our past. We're saved from the penalty of sin. Are we being saved right now? Yes, we are being saved every day from the

power of sin. But there is yet a great hope that has to do with our future salvation even from the presence of sin. So, it's a forward-looking hope.

Notice that lastly there is a patient waiting. Verse 25. "But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience." That word isn't meant in the sense of creating doubt, but more the idea of since. Since we hope. This patient waiting that he's talking about. Patient waiting in Scripture is not some sitting back, passive kind of attitude and outlook on life. No, he's already talked about this groaning that is going on. This groaning in anticipation about the future. When he talks about the fact that we're patiently waiting, this is an active patience. This is an active waiting. We are stepping into and we are engaged in and with. We're serving. We're involved with. We're pressing in to the opportunities and privileges that God has given to us, even as we wait.

What do you think as you look at verse 25 about the word "it". But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. What is the "it" that we are waiting for with patience? I think it probably is everything he said in verse 23, this matter of our inheritance, this future inheritance that is yet to be realized, this future aspect of our adoption to be pressed in to in its fullness.

And then of course, our glorified body. Someone said we are to wait neither so eagerly that we lose patience nor so patiently that we lose our expectation, but eagerly and patiently together. We wait eagerly and patiently together. Do you know why we do that? We do that because our best life is not now, not even close. Our best life is yet to come and it transcends all explanation that we could ever imagine or think.

What do we take away? I would suggest to you that the person who is satisfied with the things of this world knows very little about the glories of what's to come. If this world is what has captivated our heart, if this world is what we are giving ourselves over to, if this world and the pursuit of the things of this world is all that captures our imagination, we're in poverty. There is so little compared to what is to come. And God, my friend, uses even suffering to remind us that this life is not all there is. There is much more to come. Remember CS Lewis in *The Weight of Glory*, that amazing statement that he made: "It would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are halfhearted creatures fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when

infinite joy is offered us. Like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

Do you have that sure and certain hope this morning that your best life is actually still to come? The Word of God wants you to have that confidence. The Word of God wants you to have that assurance. He wants you to know for certain that this life or whatever it offers us, whatever joys and sorrows come with it, there is another world that awaits those who put their faith and trust in Jesus as their Savior that is far beyond anything we could ever imagine or ask or think. That is the assurance that God wants us all to have. I want you to have that assurance this morning and it comes to us through the gospel, which means good news. The good news is that Jesus, as the Son of God, came to this earth, lived a perfect sinless life, and did so in total and complete obedience to the Father. He went to that terrible and cruel cross and He did so for my sin and for yours. He paid the penalty for sin once and for all and forever. There’s not anything I can do to add to it. There is nothing I can do that is going to bring greater acceptance before God. He simply says believe on my Son. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you too will experience this life that is to come.

Let’s pray. Father God, how thankful we are as your children. First of all, just to be your children. To be called sons and daughters of God. To be adopted into your family. And Father, the great joy is to know with absolute certainty that that is the case. There’s nothing left for us to do. There’s no uncertainty. There is no list that has yet to be checked off. Jesus did everything that needs to be done. Thank you, Father. Thank you, Lord Jesus. Thank you, Holy Spirit. We love you. In Christ’s name, amen.