

“Hope: The Greatest Chapter in the Bible, pt 3” // Romans 8:18–30 // *Romans #17*

SE Asia Summary

- If you feel a curious mixture of pride at our kids doing that and shame for how difficult it is for you, say AMEN
- Hello everyone... I should probably take a moment to re-introduce myself.
 - My name is J.D...
 - (If you’ve been at this church more than twice this summer, you’ve been here more than me. Someone **stopped me on the way in** and told me I needed to go by the FTG tent because my membership had probably expired
- **I’ve spent the last month** traveling in SE Asia with my family, spending some time with a lot of our missionaries over there.)
- **I listened to several of the messages** while I was out, and I want to commend our teaching team who did such an excellent job while I was gone.
- **I spent a few weeks with several of our church’s missionaries in SE Asia. We currently have 257 adults/kids** serving all over the world; my family and I were with 51 of them.
- One of our values here is to send every member.
 - Everybody should be sent somewhere. We believe the **Great Commission is not a suggestion** for some, but a mandate for

Works Consulted:

“A Christian’s Happiness” (Romans 8:28–30), Tim Keller

“Sovereign Grace” (Romans 8:18–30), Joby Martin

“Groaning in Hope” (Romans 8:18–25), John Mark Comer

“Romans 8:18–25,” Scott Sauls

“God Will Make Everything Good” (Romans 8:26–30), Scott Sauls

“You Have Hope in Suffering” (Romans 8:18–27), Erwin Lutzer

“You Know He’s Working for Your Good” (Romans 8:28), Erwin Lutzer

- all. **Not “IF” you are called...** It’s the Great Commission, not a good suggestion.
- So, we ask you to put your **yes on the table** and let God put it on the map.
- Well, I was with a group of families just that did that and the place God put their yes was S and SE Asia.
- 2 takeaways I want to share with you
 - **Our strategy of sending ordinary people on church planting teams works.**
 - We say, “Whatever you are good at, do it well...”
 - Well, I saw functioning teams of ordinary people effectively reaching people for Jesus in one of the least reached places on the planet. We have more of these kinds of initiatives coming up, and some of you need to be involved.
 - The second takeaway is that some of you need to consider walking away from your career to be on these teams. **I spent time with a few extraordinary people** who had very bright career prospects ahead of them who laid it all down so they could carry the gospel to these places, and for some of you, he’s going to call you to that, and maybe you’ve already been sensing that.
 - **Obviously, I can’t tell you--but I want to challenge you to** put your yes on the table and let God put it on the map.

Intro:

- **Romans 8, if you have your Bible (p. 52)**--which many regard to be the greatest chapter in the Bible.

- Today, I want to talk about one of the most famous verses in that chapter; one of the most famous in the whole Bible--Romans 8:28 (**“And we know that...”**)
 - Some of you have a t-shirt with those words be-dazzled on it, or you’ve got them on a coffee mug, or it’s crocheted on a pillow you have somewhere in your house.
- We love to quote it when bad things happen: *“Hey, God’s got a plan.”*
- **But here’s the thing: IF YOU ARE HONEST--I THINK MY JOB IS TO MAKE YOU BE HONEST ABOUT QUESTIONS YOU HAVE BUT DON’T WANT TO ASK IN CHURCH.** Sometimes that verse feels hollow, or frustrating to hear, because while we can sometimes see good coming out of the bad, sometimes we don’t see any good coming from a bad thing.
- **See if you can relate to this: Brad Hambrick, our Director of Counseling here at TSC, tells a story about a girl named Natasha.** He says that though this particular story is fictional, it corresponds to dozens of similar stories he’s heard in his office. THIS IS HEAVY

Natasha¹ and her husband had longed for a child and finally conceived after five years of trying. They learn their child is a girl and decide to name her after Natasha’s mother, who died when Natasha was an infant. Throughout the pregnancy they read every book on “what to expect” and prepared a dream nursery, complete with initials on the wall in large decorative letters. Everything was set.

But... their daughter is stillborn, suffocated by the umbilical cord. The only memory they have is of her blue, still body, and the sense of guilt that they had somehow failed to help her when she needed.

Not knowing how to deal with the pain, their marriage deteriorates. They begin to lash out at each other and the volatility tears them apart.

Natasha’s husband begins to have an affair at work. He finds escape in conversations with a co-worker and convinces himself that he is really in love with this other woman. When Natasha finds some questionable emails, he lashes out, blames her, leaves, and promptly files for divorce.

Within a year he is remarried and has a child—a little girl. Natasha’s dream life is now being lived by another woman.

Because she is not really a fighter, she loses big in the divorce settlement and has to get a second job as a waitress just to make ends meet. She is driving home late one night from this job when she falls asleep at the wheel and has a wreck. Not only was the car totaled—something she could not afford—but she also crushed two vertebrae in her lower back.

This requires surgery—more money she doesn’t have—to fuse the vertebrae together. For the rest of her life, she’ll experience limited mobility, chronic pain, and be labeled “disabled.”

People try to comfort her with verses like Rom 8:1, “There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.” And while she can give mental and theological assent to that verse, it doesn’t change our feelings: She *feels* abandoned by God. Rejected. Cursed.

“But even that is more bearable (to her) than Romans 8:28—“we know that for those who love God all things work

¹ Brad Hambrick, Making Peace with Romans 8:28, *JBC* 28:3 (2014): 42–61.

together for good.” When friends try to comfort her with that verse, she knows that they just don’t understand. Sometimes she even gets angry. What possible good? What silver lining? How is any of this working for good?

Have you ever dealt with someone in this kind of situation? Have you ever gone through something like this yourself?

- **Suffering, you know, is the #1 reason people stop believing...** I was watching that Jerry Seinfeld show *Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee*... Ricky Gervais, an atheist. **People ask him if he ever prays.** He said, “No. Why would I ask God to help me find my keys if he stood and did nothing during the Holocaust?”

So, I want to talk about **what Romans 8:28 really means.** I want to give you **3 myths Christians believe about suffering** that this passage corrects:

Myth 1: If we live well, we can avoid suffering

- Many Christians believe that **if they live like they are supposed to**, they can avoid, or at least minimize, suffering.
- But notice that Paul assumes in this passage that suffering is a part of the believer’s life.
 - This present time has sufferings (vs. 18);
 - And “we groan under them” (vs. 23).
 - All of “creation (of which we are a part) is subject to futility and in bondage to corruption” (v. 21).
- Nothing in this passage assumes that if you are God’s child, you can avoid these realities. In fact, it says the opposite.
- Jesus told his disciples, In this world you will have tribulation. Maybe worse, because you also have Satan!
- A related assumption many believe in our culture is that life by itself inevitably turns out positive; that the universe is wired to

turn out for good; structured so that every dark cloud eventually has a silver lining.

- The little Orphan Annie philosophy: “The sun’ll come out, tomorrow...”
- This passage actually indicates the opposite. Creation, Paul says, is in **bondage** to futility. That’s **where it is all headed.**
- It’s **only through God special intervention** on behalf believers that anything works out for good.
- (BTW, the CSB translation of **vs. 28** here is not ideal. It just reads, “all things work together for good,” which you could mistakenly take to mean that they just somehow naturally turn out for good. So, don’t worry, be happy.” Hakuna Matata.
- But the **actual Greek makes it clear that God** is the one who is working them for good in a world where it going the opposite direction. It is **only through a special act of grace** toward believers that God redeems bad circumstances for good.
- **A good illustration** you can think about if you go to the beach this summer is that all those **tiny grains of sand on the beach used to be part of a great mountain. The greatest mountains in creation inevitably dissolve into sand.** This is where it’s all headed. It’s in bondage to corruption.

Myth 2: Suffering always points to some sin we need to confess

- The idea here is that **in suffering God is always trying to get your attention in order to correct some error; expose some sin you need to confess.**
- And, let me be clear, **sometimes this is true.** Affliction is one of God’s choice tools to wake us up.
 - The author of Psalm 119 says, **“Before I was afflicted, I went astray.”** (Ps 119:67).
 - God put Jonah in the belly of a whale to get his attention.
 - Sometimes God puts us flat on our back so we’ll finally be looking in the right direction.
- But that’s **not always the case.**

- **The suffering Paul talks about here in Romans 8** doesn't appear to be in response to anything wrong.
- In the book of the Bible that most deals with suffering, Job, God makes clear that Job was not suffering because of his sin--God calls him the most righteous man alive on earth at the time!
- Jesus was the most righteous person ever to live and he suffered. Not all suffering is trying to correct something in you.
- And if it is, God will quickly let you know what it is. **With my kids, if I punish them to correct something in them,** they always know what it is. **When they were little,** I didn't walk into their room, spank them, and they say, "Why, Daddy?" and I say, "You figure it out."
- **If God sends suffering your way because of sin,** he will very quickly make it known to you what that is. If you don't know, there's a real good chance this suffering is not like Jonah's wake-up-call, and more like Job's mysterious suffering.

Myth 3: We will always be able to find the silver linings behind our dark clouds

- **This is the big one, where people use Rom 8:28 wrongly.** They say, "Well, the Bible says, 'All things work together for good.' So where is the silver lining for this one?"
- **And of course, sometimes we can see it:** "*A car accident awakens an alcoholic to the severity of his addiction*";² *a painful break-up sets you up for an even better relationship.* Our church was planted by a guy who felt called to the mission field but discovered his son had a heart defect and had to wait a year to go to seek medical treatment, and in the meantime... and we can say, "See, all things work together for good"
 - Or **sometimes we discover how a painful or confusing chapter** of our lives prepared us for something. **Pastor Bryan told a great story** illustrating this the other week: **Karate Kid.** This kid Daniel who keeps getting beat-up wants to learn

karate so he can defend himself, and so Mr. Miyagi agrees to teach him, and enters him into a karate tournament in 3 weeks... "Wax on/Wax off"

- And Bryan told us: *You'll have your moment!*
- But **here's the thing: sometimes you don't** see that. **Natasha** didn't.
- **In this chapter, Paul indicates that much of the good** God brings out of our suffering will be manifested only in eternity.
 - **Notice in vs. 18** he points to **"...the glory that is going to be revealed..."** It's not all experienced now.
 - In vs. 25 he says we have to wait for it... **"We eagerly wait for it with patience."** vs. 25
 - Look at vs. 24, **"We are saved in hope,** (Paul says) **but hope that is seen is not hope."**(if you can see it, it's not hope, it's sight)
- **A lot of us say we want to live by faith,** but the moment we can't see or understand what God is doing we throw up our hands and say, "Are you even there?"
 - **We say we want to live by faith,** but we also want to be able to understand why every bad thing happened. We want to be able to say, **"Oh, I see. I get it now."** But that is **not walking by faith.** That's walking by sight.
 - Faith means trusting God even when you can't see him.
 - Faith means, Paul says, waiting patiently until the end to experience resolution.
- It means **not declaring a verdict** over your life until you experience the glory of eternity.
 - This reminds me of one of my **favorite little stories** about the bird who flew south for winter... **Lesson 1:** *Not everyone who drops manure on you is your enemy.* **Lesson 2:** *Not everyone who digs you out is your friend.* **Lesson 3:** *When you're in manure, sometimes it's helpful to keep your little chirper shut and wait until the end of the story to sing.*

² BH, 49

- **Sometimes you just don't know** and it's best to keep your mouth shut and wait patiently for what God is doing.
- **Or think of it this way:** Do you ever notice how the best movies create tension that don't resolve until the very end.
 - The **best book series** create tensions that sometimes don't get resolved until later in the series.
 - **There was a show I started watching on TV... long arcs.** The best movies and shows have long arcs. Sometimes things aren't resolved until the very end.
 - That's **how our lives work**.
- **Avoid the temptation to declare that nothing makes sense** until you have gotten to God's finale to the whole series. LONG ARC

So, if those are the 5 myths, let's now **turn it around** and ask,

What hope does God give me in suffering? (in Romans 8)

Vs. 28, he promises...

A. God is using all things to make me more like Jesus (vs. 28–29)

- People always overlook the last part of vs. 28, which may be the most important part: 28 "We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. And what is that purpose? 29 For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son..."
- God's purpose in all things is to make you more like Jesus. The "good" Romans 8 talks about **not so much giving you better circumstances** as it is making you a better you. A person like Jesus.
- **Invariably, at every moment, God is working toward that.** That painful chapter in your marriage, that setback at work, that chronic illness--all of it was for that end.

- And there will come a time, if you submit to God in faith, when you see that all the painful chapters, all the heartaches and tears and disabilities and disadvantages and disappointments--even those seasons of boredom and loneliness--were used by God for one purpose: to mold you more into the image of Jesus.
- So, instead of only asking God to get you out of the trouble, **also ask** him what you should get out of the trouble.
- **Somewhere, at some time in some way in eternity**, you'll have your Mr. Miyagi moment and realize that the "sand the floor" and "paint the fence" and "wax on, wax off" moments were teaching you to be like Jesus.
- **You know how I tell the tapestry story?**... Someone gave me a gift recently and my daughter pointed out would make an even better illustration of that. (**Pillow**).

*God has promised is to use all things to make you more like Jesus...
Second -*

B. My story ends with the redemption of my body (vs. 22–23)

- Paul says in vs. 22 that 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together with labor pains until now... we also groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.
- **There is a physical redemption coming**, and our bodies literally groan for it.
 - And the **40 and up crowd is going "Amen."** If you're in your 20's, you probably don't get it yet and wa hate you for it.
 - **Curtis showed you the pic last week** that made it look like I'd aged and I thought, "Well, I don't look like that yet but that's how I feel sometimes."
 - **Y'all know what makes me tired now?** Preaching. Just standing up here and talking. By the end of it I have to take a nap.

- Jet lag: **I used to bounce back...** if I'd preached last weekend, I'd have fallen asleep. It's one thing for you to fall asleep while I'm preaching. It's another for me to! ³
- **But this body is one day going to be redeemed. Not just back to the days of my youth, but to a body like Christ's resurrection body:** It's not going to ache or get sick or struggle with weight gain: I'm pretty sure that in heaven God has rewired things so that eating broccoli and cauliflower makes you fat and eating ice cream and bacon makes you skinny.
 - **Joni Eareckson Tada**, who was paralyzed as a teenager in a diving accident and lived as a quadriplegic for more than 70 years, wrote: "When I get to heaven I am going to push my wheelchair to the throne of Jesus. Notice I'll be walking. I am going to thank Him for every character-refining work He did in me and through me because of this wheelchair. And then I'm going to ask Jesus to send this wheelchair straight to Hell, because it was only needed/relevant because of the wreckage of sin."
- And along with my body, **all of creation is going to be redeemed.**
 - All the best parts of nature and creation are going to be redeemed, and without the curse of sin.
 - **Revelation and Isaiah even say that heaven will be full of animals**--good animals where their poisonous or predatory nature has been removed. The lion lies down with the lamb, Isaiah says, and the child plays with the snake.
 - **I know that makes some of you wonder about individual animals, like your dog that died. And honestly, the Bible doesn't have a lot to say about that specifically.** Your dog doesn't have a soul—but, **honestly, who knows?** I wouldn't put reuniting you with your beloved dog past your Heavenly Father. You might see your dog again there. If you want to see your cat, you are probably going to have to go the other direction.

³ From Joby Martin's sermon, "Sovereign Grace"

- **I don't understand everything there is to know** about what is waiting on us, but **Paul says (v. 18) that it is so glorious that the painfulness** of the worst pain here can't even compare to the glory of that glorious.
 - We can't comprehend it. **We'll be like Jesus.** The Bible says we'll be glorified like the sun. S-U-N (Dan 12:9). So glorious to try and look at it now would hurt your eyes.
- Paul says in Corinthians: **Eye has not seen, nor ear heard...For God to try and explain it to us now** would be like giving a Rembrandt or a Monet to a kindergartner. We just don't have the receptors to comprehend ⁴
- And **Paul says in light of the glory experienced there**, even the worst things we experience now are going to seem just like a "light and momentary affliction." (2 Cor 4:16)
- **Paul is not trying to minimize your pain! He knew pain... He was saying that compared to the glory that is going to be revealed** even worst pain is only light and momentary.
- *"It will be worth it all when we see Jesus. One glimpse at his dear face, all sorrow will erase, so I'll gladly run the race till I see him."*

Here is your assurance, friends:

- **Not one second of your suffering is wasted.** Not one thing happens in your life that the goodness of our God will not transform into glory.
- **And one day, you will be able to look back over your life** and see this.

The Christian group Shane and Shane have a song, "Though You Slay Me". It was written by one of the guys, Shane Barnard, when his dad passed away unexpectedly. In the middle of the song, they spliced in an excerpt from a John Piper sermon. **I love Piper's words here:**

- "Not only is all your affliction 'momentary', not only is it 'light' in comparison to eternity and the glory there, but every second of it

⁴ From Joby Martin, "Sovereign Grace"

is totally meaningful... Every millisecond of your misery in the path of obedience is producing a peculiar glory you will get because of that suffering. I don't care if it was cancer or criticism, slander or sickness. It wasn't meaningless... It's doing something!

Of course, you can't always see what it's doing. Don't look to what is seen. When your mom dies, when a child dies, when you've got cancer at 40, when a car careens into the sidewalk and takes her out--don't say "That's meaningless!" It's not! It's working for you an eternal weight of glory.

Therefore, don't lose heart, but take these truths (of Romans 8) and day-by-day focus on them. Preach them to yourself every morning. Get alone with God and preach his Word into your mind until your heart sings with confidence that you are known and cared for."⁵⁶

We're not done. 3rd element of hope:

C. In the meantime, the Spirit perfectly intercedes for me (vs. 26)

- 26 In the same way the Spirit also helps us in our weakness, because we do not know what to pray for as we should, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with unspoken groanings. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because he intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.
- **The Spirit groans in us. You say, "What does that mean?"** Well, Paul uses this word "groan" to mirror what creation is doing.⁷
- I think we see a **couple of things here** in this groaning:

⁵ <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-glory-of-god-in-the-sight-of-eternity/excerpts/none-of-our-misery-is-meaningless>

⁶ I first heard this quoted in Joby Martin's sermon, "Sovereign Grace"

⁷ Schreiner, Romans, 437–38. BTW, this is not a reference to tongues, because this is not a special gift, like tongues, but something the Spirit does in and for all believers. One commentator put it this way: "Our own prayers are insufficient, for they are finite and

- **Emotion:** That **groan indicates deep emotion**. He is feeling our pain with us. I think of one of the most moving scenes of Jesus's life takes place in John 11, when Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus. He weeps.
 - BTW, sometimes Christians think their pain doesn't matter because, comparatively, it's not that bad.
 - sometimes, we even use **stories** of someone else's worse pain to make each other feel better.
 - A friend of Natasha (whose story I told at the beginning) might say to her, "At least you're not a quadriplegic or held hostage by a terrorist..." and that's **somehow supposed to make her feel better**.
 - But "**suffering is not a competitive sport.**"⁸ Just because someone else got hit by a truck doesn't mean your knee surgery hurts less. Just because someone else has terminal cancer doesn't mean getting passed over for a promotion is any less insulting.
 - "We are **not competing with Auschwitz** for God's compassion."
 - Your pain is real, and Jesus feels it. And the Spirit groans even more deeply than you do.
- **Wisdom: The Spirit prays** "according to the will of God." **He prays the will of God** perfectly over us, that God's good purpose will be accomplished to the letter.
- **Brothers and sisters, that assurance** that he is praying for us is something we can rest in!
 - **My pastor growing up, and one of the greatest prayer-warriors ever to walk the face of the earth, Dr. Sheehan:** "I'm praying for you. But even more importantly, Jesus is." This

ignorant of God's true plan. But that is the very source of our greatest comfort. While we do not know, the Spirit does, and he is praying for us more deeply than we are praying for ourselves." Grant Osborne, IVP Commentary on Romans

⁸ BH, 45.

verse says, "So is the Spirit." The **whole Trinity** is involved in the affair.

- **Be encouraged: in your moment of pain, when you can't even express the words yourself, the Spirit is praying for you.**

Last component of hope Paul gives us for our suffering:

D. What God started, he's going to finish (vv. 29–30)

- In vs. 29, Paul brings up the "p" word: **predestination**. **29 For those he foreknew he also *predestined* to be conformed to the image of his Son...**
- Paul **doesn't bring this up here to try and start** a theological argument. He's not saying, "I'm a Calvinist." He's **trying to give you assurance**. See what he says in the next verse? **30 And those he predestined, he also called; and those he called, he also justified; and those he justified, he also glorified.**
- **Paul is saying**, "I know sometimes in your suffering, you feel like you are barely holding on. **But have this assurance:** what God started in you, he's going to finish. If you show evidence of being called and justified, you're going to be glorified."
- **When you feel like you are barely holding on** to him, be assured that he's still holding on to you.
- **God didn't choose you because of your righteousness.** He chose you just because he set his love on you. And if he didn't choose you because of your righteousness, he's not going to drop you because of some failure in righteousness.
- **When my daughters were younger I used to say to them at night**, "I love you. Does daddy love you because you are pretty?" Why? Just because. Just because they are my daughters. I've set my love on them and I'm never taking it from them.
- That's what God has done with you. You've been adopted into his family. He didn't choose you because of your righteousness, he chose you despite your lack of it. And if he didn't choose you

because of your righteousness, he's not going to drop you because of some failure in righteousness.

These are our 4 pillars of hope in a world consumed by pain, corruption and futility.

Let me close by addressing 3 different groups of people directly:

FIRST, if you are in a season of pain, and you don't see any good coming out of it, can I convince you just to withhold judgment? **What God is going may be revealed only in eternity. For now, what you've got to hold onto is the character of God--which is where Paul will take us next week.**

This is what the hymn-writer meant when he wrote those words:

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father, There is no shadow of turning with Thee. Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not, As Thou hast been, Thou forever will be

Pardon for sin, And a peace that endureth, Thine own dear presence to cheer, And to guide. Strength for today, and bright hope for tomorrow, Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside

Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow: this is what is offered to you.

SECOND, if you are walking with someone going through pain: take a clue from the Spirit of God: don't try to explain everything. You may be trying to explain what can't be explained. **Just sit with them.** And weep with them as they weep. And pray along with the Spirit with them.

Finally, I want to say something to unbelievers. Some of you may be tempted to sit here and say, "Well, I like this hope; what a peaceful

and comforting way to live.” But these things are **true only because of who Jesus is**; and they are only true for us because we have given ourselves to him.

- If you are outside of him, ***none of these promises are true for you.*** (They can be, but you have to receive it)
- **And, even more importantly, if Jesus is not who he says he is,** none of these promises are true for anybody!
- **So, that’s the question you need to wrestle with.** Is Jesus who he says he is. I think of the words of C.S. Lewis here who said, (and I paraphrase): *Don’t come to Christianity because it’s comforting. Don’t come to Christianity because it’s encouraging. Don’t come to Christianity because it’s relevant. Don’t come to Christianity because it’s exciting. Come to Christianity because it’s true.*

But, do know, **the hopelessness of your pain without Christ is something that should make you seriously consider his claims.**

- For those in Christ, Paul explains, our cries of suffering are like labor pains. If you are in the hospital, and hear someone crying out in pain, but know it’s coming from the maternity ward...
- **On the other hand... if it’s someone on their deathbed.**

Only Jesus says, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live!” Only he has overcome the grave. Only he can overturn all the bad things for good!