

Romans 8: 17-39 – Sermon
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The great pessimist, Woody Allen, once said:

* “Life is full of misery, loneliness, and suffering - and it's all over much too soon.”

Life is hard. Through all the suffering, all the decay and destruction, the sadness, the death, the mourning, the troubles and hardships... life is hard. But Romans 8 gives us a new perspective. It challenges us to compare TODAY with TOMORROW. TODAY on this earth. TOMORROW in heaven.

* TODAY and TOMORROW.

First, think of all the hard stuff in your life TODAY. Sick? Stressed? Sad? Lonely? Depressed? Family problems? Disappointment? What is it TODAY that's hard for you? What things in life make you think that sometimes life *can be* full of misery, loneliness and suffering?

Now think about TOMORROW. And we're not talking about Monday here. We're talking about the tomorrow of life beyond this world. The return of the Lord Jesus. When we compare TODAY with TOMORROW, there is a HUGE difference.

III – I once had a friend who bought a new car and for 2 years she was really unhappy with it's performance. It didn't go very fast. In fact it couldn't really go above about 70kms/hr. And it sounded really horrible when it went fast. It was terrible on petrol. It chewed through the oil. And after 2 years, the gearbox blew up. When the mechanic had a look at the gearbox, he said to her: “First gear is absolutely destroyed. Completely useless and completely worn out. But the other gears are fine. Perfect condition. Absolutely like new.”

She responded: “What other gears? I thought it only had one gear! You mean there's more than one gear?”

For 2 years, she drove her little Honda in first gear. The engine groaned and screamed everywhere she went. And she was completely oblivious to the fact that there was more to this car than 1st gear!

And I guess that sums up our life on this earth from the perspective of Romans 8. Stuck in first gear. Groaning. Whining. Straining. TODAY is difficult, painful, and hard. But there is another gear! Paul compares TODAY with childbirth. He wants us to imagine watching a woman in labour. I've done that 3 times so far. And the story is always the same. It's horrible, but you're hoping for something wonderful. You don't know exactly when. There's a lot of groaning and a lot of pain. And a lot of waiting. But you KNOW that the labour is going to end eventually.

And what's interesting in the start of this chapter, is that there are three lots of “groaning” Paul speaks about.

* First, the earth is groaning – all of creation. Through earthquakes and floods and droughts, God's creation is groaning for the day when it will be made perfect again.

* Second, *we* are groaning. God's people are groaning inwardly as we wait for our adoption as God's sons and daughters. We are already his children, but we are still waiting for, verse 23, the redemption of our bodies. Although we have been made God's children, although we have been given eternal life, we are still waiting for that final resurrection day when we will have the eternal bodies we have been promised. We're waiting for that day of hope – when there will be no more pills, no more walking sticks, no hearing aids, or glasses, or physiotherapists, or diets,... we are waiting expectantly for the day we receive our eternal bodies.

We are already God's children, but our bodies have not yet been transformed.

And so we groan. With creation. And thirdly, the Spirit of God groans.

* The spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, who lives in us, groans. He knows our minds. He sees our frustration and our longing. And he groans for us without words. In groans that words cannot express.

I wonder if you've ever felt that inability to express something in words to God. Those times when things are so difficult – the kids are sick, you lose your job, you're over tired, your marriage is struggling. A bomb kills a few thousand people. A tsunami kills tens of thousands of people. A child dies. And there are no words that can express your frustration to God. But the Spirit of God knows our hearts and groans without words, and he communicates what is inexpressible for us, to the Father.

I guess you could just take that away today – there is never a time when God doesn't completely understand what you're facing and feeling – because the Holy Spirit, who lives in you, communicates for you what you cannot communicate in words.

The world groans. We groan. And God's Holy Spirit groans within us. Waiting for tomorrow. TODAY there is groaning. But TOMORROW is glory.

Just look back to how Paul opens this chapter –

* *"I consider that our present sufferings are **not worth comparing** with the glory that will be revealed in us."*

When you look at all the groaning, all the pain and suffering – when you see the world in labour, when you yourself are frustrated by life on this earth, you cannot compare it to the glory that is ahead. And I wonder if we sometimes lose sight of that?

* **III** – Life's short?

The last time I preached on this passage was at the funeral of a man named Andrew. He was just over 40 years old. Three kids between 12 and 6. Died of cancer. As you can imagine, there were a lot of tears at that funeral. But because he knew the Lord Jesus, and so did his family, they were tears of joy and hope. There was grief in losing him TODAY, but there was joy for TOMORROW!

At a lot of funerals, but not at Andrew's, I hear people say "Life is short". But you see, that's the lie! Because, quite simply, if you know Jesus, life is NOT short! Life with Jesus is eternal. And while TODAY might often be very painful, we have the promise of TOMORROWS glory!

* **While we groan TODAY, we cannot lose sight of the glory of TOMORROW.**

As someone famous once said: For the Christian, death is not a full stop. It's a comma. If you have lost sight of the glory of tomorrow, then keep reading from verse 28 –

* *"28And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him who have been called according to his purpose.*

No matter what we may *THINK* God is doing, we can *KNOW* that he is working for our good! There may be times we doubt suffering or death could possibly be for our own good, but God knows it is! And if we doubt this at times, then listen to a few of these last questions Paul asks and answers for us:

* Question 1: *"31 If God is for us, who can be against us? 32He 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?"*

Of course, there may be a lot of people against us, including the devil, but if God is for us, who can possibly **stand** against us? The answer is of course, "No-one."

God gave up his own son for us. Is there anything that he wouldn't give us? I don't know about you, but the last thing I would give up would be my own son. If I was prepared to give him up, I'd give up anything! The cross of Jesus is our **guarantee** of God's unfailing and unending sacrificial love for us. If God gives up **Jesus** for us, what will he hold back? The answer is of course, "Nothing!"

* Question 2. *"34Who is he that condemns? 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 can condemn us? Because Jesus stands in our defense. He intercedes for us. In other words, he speaks to God on our behalf. We stand in court and are declared by God to be guilty of sin and deserving of death. But Jesus stands up next to us in court and says: *"The sentence has already been passed. And the penalty has already been paid by me."*

The answer is "No-one can condemn us, because Jesus has freed us."

* Finally, question 3. *35Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?*

Can anything that we go through TODAY separate us from his love TOMORROW? The answer is in verse 37:

** 37No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*

Jesus showed he LOVED us at the cross. At that moment in history, Jesus showed undeniably that he loved us. And he still does. And because of that love, we are **more** than conquerors over **everything and everyone** TODAY. Verse 38:

38For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39neither 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.

Nothing can separate us from God's love for us. And not only that, through all these things that the world brings on us TODAY – trouble, hardship, suffering – through all these things, we are MORE than conquerors. You see, it's one thing to say "No matter what the world does to me today, I will **overcome** them all because of Jesus." It's another thing to say "I will more than conquer these things because of Jesus." You see, we don't just overcome suffering because of Jesus. We are strengthened by it. Because everything this world brings upon us reminds us of the strength of his love and his promise of TOMORROW.

* As Romans 5:3 says: *"Suffering produces perseverance; perseverance character; and character hope."*

We gain our hope for TOMORROW from the suffering in this world. Life TODAY can sometimes feel like we're in a space shuttle, hurtling into space with the g-forces nearly ripping us apart. We often feel pulled apart by life in every direction. But NOTHING can separate us from TOMORROW with God. Never forget that the glory is yet to come. Never forget that TODAY will give way to TOMORROW. Never forget that all the suffering and all the groaning will all give way to the eternal glory of the day of your resurrection. Hallelujah and Amen.