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Sermon Series: *Now, Wait Just a Minute*, No. 3

Pains of Childbirth

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Romans 8:18-27 (NIV)

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³ Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

²⁶ 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. ²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

We're in Romans, Chapter Eight, this morning. Turn back there with me, if you would. The eighth chapter of Romans.

As many of us would probably say, music was a big part of especially our teenage years. Every week, Kasey Kasem and the American Top 40 was required listening, as far as I was concerned.

And for some reason, whether or not you really want to, you tend to remember music – at least I do.

And so, what I'm finding these days is that lots of the topics and issues that are in today's news are calling up words and tunes to songs I remember from decades ago.

And although pop music is not typically God-honoring, the best of it does deal in life's larger questions and themes, which means pop music becomes theological in nature, since sooner or later, in one way or another, everything about life comes back to theology.

That's why theology has been, for millennia, considered the "Queen of the Sciences." No matter what the discipline, if you travel far enough down its road, it brings you back to the question of God.

Just the same, the answers to the questions that have been, for decades, raised and sung about in pop music – questions and issues about relationships, sexuality, purpose, conflict, war, meaning of life, success, love, dreams – all come back, one way or another, sooner or later, to God.

So, whether or not they realized it, pop musicians, in their songs, were – and still are today – doing theology.

I'm not saying they're doing *good* theology, necessarily, but they *are* doing theology.

Even though they were very popular for a few years, I never really loved the group, Tom Petty and the

Heartbreakers. Honestly, his voice seemed rather whiny to me.

But just the same, in 1981, they scored their first hit with a song called *The Waiting*, which came to mind this last week – the first time I'd thought of that song in years – as I studied more of the Bible's comments on waiting.

And though Tom Petty expresses it with a whine, his reflections on waiting wind up, remarkably, in much the same place as the apostle Paul's – here in Romans 8.

So, mark this moment: this may be the only time in history that Tom Petty and the Apostle Paul have appeared in the same sermon.

That chorus that Petty sings says, "The waiting is the hardest part. Every day you get one more yard. You take it on faith – you take it to the heart. The waiting is the hardest part."

The waiting that's involved to get to where you want to go – where you dream of going. The waiting involved in becoming what you dream of being.

Fighting your way through the static and suffering of life to get somewhere good – that's what Petty said is the meaning behind his song.

The waiting for a magnificent resolution.

Knowing where we're going – knowing what the end will be, but enduring the waiting involved in getting to that place. It's *hard*. It's *really* hard.

But, it's worth it!

That's Petty's message in the song, and really, that's the Apostle Paul's message too, in this part of Romans 8.

There is a certain amount of suffering involved in life due to the sin that was introduced into the world at the fall. I mentioned that last Sunday, and it's important to understand that.

And choosing to trust and follow Jesus does not remove us from that. If you imagine that following Jesus will somehow keep you from suffering, then you have a rude awakening coming.

Because the Bible is full of places – Jesus Himself says over and over again that those who follow Him will suffer – where followers suffered just as He suffered.

Just as the sinful world did not tolerate Jesus, so will the sinful world not tolerate those who *follow* Him – those who are *like* Him. Jesus said it: the student is not above the teacher. The servant is not above the master.¹

If the world was out to get Jesus, which it was, then the world will be out to get us. We have to settle that reality in our minds, or we will never truly follow Christ. We will wind up backing away from Him and acquiescing to the world when the going gets hard.

This is the way it is for Christians today, just as it was the way it was for the Christians at Rome 2000 years ago,

¹ Matthew 10:24

as Paul admits here. Paul is writing these words, by the way, not long after one of the most intense periods of suffering that he ever experienced himself – the very hard time he had at Ephesus, which he talks more about in Second Corinthians.

Paul well understood suffering in general, but also specifically for the sake of Jesus, which is why he can write with authority in verse 17, that Christ-followers are *“heirs with Christ if we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory.”*

You see, all Christ followers will suffer.

But we are not the only ones who share in Jesus’ suffering.

The fact is, Paul says, the whole *creation* is suffering because of the sin introduced into the world by Adam and Eve at the Garden of Eden.

In verse 20, Paul writes, *“the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it.”*

Who subjected it?

God did, according to Genesis 3, either directly or indirectly, as a consequence to Adam and Eve’s choice and as a part of the punishment of their sin.

What does this mean? It means the creation is no longer able to do and be what God made it to do and be.

The very nature of creation – the nature of this world and the nature of nature – has been changed, such that it would now naturally produce thistles instead of naturally producing food and good crops – a fact that anyone who tries to grow anything, especially around here, will affirm.

If you have a field of dirt and leave it to its own devices, what fills that field? What you won’t get naturally is a field full of corn or soybeans or potatoes. What you will get is a field full of chaos, in the form of weeds. Dandelions, milkweed, chickweed and Johnsongrass.

If you have a garden but don’t fertilize and weed it, what happens? Chaos.

If you have an orchard and don’t spray it, what happens? Chaos.

If you have even buildings, streets, or homes, and you don’t maintain them, what happens to them? Chaos.

When left to its own, the ground produces – and the world moves toward – chaos.

That’s the way things are today.

But God did not originally make the world to work like that and to act that way, you see? The creation itself is suffering this change to its nature that sin has thrust upon it.

It’s not the earth’s choice to be this way. It doesn’t want to be this way.

The earth wants to be what it was created to be. It wants to produce good fruit. It wants to move toward order. It wants its as-created harmony – its as-created nature – back, but that nature is out of its reach – for now.

And so, there is suffering going on, you see, at every level in our world, and it is caused by the sin, and the consequences of the sin, of Adam and Eve.

That’s just the way things are for now.

But, as Paul affirms here, there is good, good news!

There is a time coming when all this “corruption of nature...” – the corruption of *human* nature and the corruption of the natural tendencies of the world... There’s coming a time when all this corruption and chaos is going to end, and both *people and the earth* – the *whole* created order – will be *redeemed*.

A time is coming when all creation will become, again, what it was made to be in the first place.

The nature of nature will be restored.

There is coming a resolution to the chaos.

In verse 21 there, Paul writes, *“The creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.”*

This is the day of Christ’s return and reign here on earth, you see? When all will be made right again.

And we wait for that day, followers of Jesus. We wait for that day, even though we have, Paul says there in verse 23, the first fruits of that redemption, because we have the Holy Spirit in our midst.

We, followers of Jesus, have the preview to the whole of the thing.

And creation benefits from our preview, too. To the degree that we live and operate in the power of God’s Holy Spirit, all around us, even nature shares in some benefit from the presence of God’s Spirit and the beginnings of redemption.

But, there is much more to come. The great redemption of God is far from complete, so because of that, there is still suffering – for us and for our world – and there *will be* until Jesus returns.

And so, for that day we wait, you see?

Followers of Christ and the whole created order: we all wait together.

And, we suffer while we wait.

That’s not any sort of unexpected thing. Until we’re transformed *completely* to what God originally made us to be, we will suffer. All creation – from you and me to the birds to the bugs, from the atmosphere to the sea to the dirt to the trees: everything is, in some way, suffering.

And it’s all suffering more than maybe we even really know.

Maybe we’ve gotten so used to living with this sin and all its effects around us that we don’t realize, fully, the magnitude of the suffering that’s going on.

Paul tries to get at that by personifying creation there in verse 22, by likening creation’s suffering to the pains of childbirth.

Some of you women know what that’s like. Some of you don’t.

None of you men do, in spite of what Apple’s ridiculous new pregnant man emoji might suggest.

I’ll just say, after witnessing the birth of my children: sure, it’s an amazing – divinely amazing – experience and one that I’m very glad to watch from the male side of the table.

From what I hear from someone I feel is a trustworthy source, it is *excruciating, which is* – don’t miss this – the Apostle Paul’s way of describing the *magnitude* of the

suffering that you and I and all the earth feels due to sin, you see?

Paul in no way *dismisses* or *minimizes* or *marginalizes* the *pain* that comes from the chaos – the *weight* of sin here – and the waiting that’s involved in its resolution.

He knows how hard things are.

And *yet*, just as there *is* an *end* to *childbirth*, so is there an *end* to the creation’s suffering.

It will be painful, as childbirth is painful.

And it may take a while to resolve, as childbirth took a while for some of you.

But *still*, the outcome of the process – even following *much, much* suffering: Paul says the outcome is worth it all.

That which is born makes all the pain worthwhile.

Verse 18 there, *“I consider our present sufferings not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed.”*

This said by someone who had suffered, and specifically suffered for Jesus’ sake far, far more than most.

“These sufferings aren’t even worth comparing to the glory to come.”

Maybe that’s hard for us to imagine. At times it is, certainly, as we’re walking through suffering of whatever kind. I’d imagine moms, in the midst of childbirth, have wondered, “could this possibly be worth it?”

But Paul assures us that, as hard as things are now, it’s only for a short time, and what’s to come will make it all worthwhile.

Even though we groan under the weight of sin – even though all creation groans while we wait together, the outcome will be worth the pain. It will be worth the suffering, the groaning, the waiting.

Followers of Jesus: we wait in these days for our full adoption as God’s children, Paul says there in verse 23. We already are, in fact, adopted, and we have the first fruits of that.

But there is more blessing to come.

It’s like we’re orphans who’ve been adopted, but have not yet gone to live with our new parents. We’re adopted in fact, we’re adopted legally. The paperwork is done, and we share the benefits that our adoptive parents have sent on ahead to us, but for now we’re still in the confines of the orphanage. Our parents have not yet come to take us home.

That is our state as followers of Jesus.

It’s the state of the creation itself: it’s a field that’s been bought and paid for. There’s a “sold” sign out by the road and the legal stuff has all been taken care of at the courthouse, but the new owner – the gardener, has yet

to take full ownership and begin the tilling and the weeding and the planting that makes the field fruitful.

So, until our parent arrives – until the owner takes full possession, all we can do is wait.

We wait in ongoing suffering – for now. The orphanage meals are still crummy, and the weeds still choke out the good plants.

But we wait in confidence. We wait in sure hope.

We wait knowing the day of redemption is coming.

And all that will happen – the renewal that will take place on that day – will be worth it all.

Is that a word you need to hear today?

Has the waiting been getting to you?

I know the news can be terrible. The state of our world – the chaos that seems to reign – is paraded before us on the news every day.

And it comes home to roost personally too, doesn’t it? The chaos? Things aren’t like we thought they’d be – like we dreamed they’d be – in this or that part of our lives.

But don’t let the present overwhelm you, as excruciating as it may be.

Have you lost sight of what will be born when this season is over?

Have you forgotten that the way things are is not the way things will always be?

Do you need more grace for the waiting?

Jesus will provide that for you.

I’m not saying He’ll make the waiting painless.

I’m not promising that He’ll totally take away the suffering.

But Jesus will walk the road – and He will wait the wait – with you.

He will give you perspective.

He’ll remind you of what’s to come.

And He will give you His peace in the process.

Do you need a word from Jesus about the pains of childbirth you’re going through? Do you need to feel Him nearby? Do you need a vision of the glory to come?

Ask Him to give you what you need and to remind you that one day, the glory to come will be worth it all.

Closing Song: *It Will Be Worth It All*

Benediction:

May the Lord Jesus meet us all in our waiting with the reminder of the sure hope that one day, the waiting will end.

The suffering – the chaos of our world – and the pains of childbirth will be over.

The wait will be worth it – when we see Jesus!