

Three phases of Christian life

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[0 : 00] Romans chapter 8 and verse 18. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it in hope, that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons for redemption of our bodies.

But in this hope we are saved, that hope that is seen as no hope at all, who hopes for what he already has. But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

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 with groans that words cannot express.

[1 : 18] And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. When Sir John Hunt led the expedition that finally conquered Everest in 1953, he established three types of camps.

There was the base camp from which they began at the foot of the mountain. Then there were a series of advanced camps at various stages up the mountain. And finally there was a summit camp at and near the top.

Last week we thought of that as an illustration of the three phases of living the Christian life. There must be a beginning. There must be a base camp, as it were.

And that beginning, says Paul, according to his letter to the Romans, is when we are justified by faith. When we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and accept him as our Saviour and Lord. That is the beginning.

One doesn't slide into the Christian life. One doesn't become a Christian by death. One does not become a Christian by baptism. One becomes a Christian when one consciously believes in the Lord Jesus Christ and commits one's life and soul to him.

[2 : 38] And having begun, the Christian life becomes a climb. A climb towards the summit. And there are a series of advanced camps. And that long trek is called sanctification.

The process of becoming more and more like our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. And that is why when we become Christians, God leaves us here. In order that we might become progressively like our Lord Jesus Christ.

And more and more like God. Until finally we arrive at the summit camp. Until finally we are glorified together with Christ. Until finally we arrive at what the Bible calls glory.

Now the conquerors of Everest found that getting to the base camp and then on to the advanced camp was a tremendously exacting experience.

There was a lack of oxygen in the air. There were precipitous routes to be crossed. There were ice crevices to be negotiated and so on.

[3 : 47] It was an exacting task which demanded the highest discipline and skill. But they believed when they got to the top it was worth it. And one can imagine the exhilarating feeling that Sir Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Pencing as they felt when they got to the top.

The first men to reach the top of Everest. And they looked out in the highest point of the world. They knew it was all worthwhile. And so it was exacting up until that point.

And then it became exhilarating. Now what Paul is saying here is that there is a parallel with that in the Christian life. Because to begin to follow Jesus Christ will cost us.

If any man will come after me, he said Jesus, let him deny himself. Let him take up his cross and follow me. And as we seek to follow him and go from one advanced camp to the other in the Christian life, we will also discover that it costs to follow Jesus Christ.

That is inbuilt into the Christian life an element of suffering. And we should not be blind to this fact. It's simply because we happen to be privileged in comparison with a vast number of Christian people in the world today.

[5 : 04] And the vast number of Christian people down throughout the centuries. We have had a much harder lot than we have. And who knows that our lot may get harder before many years' time.

But Paul says that although to begin to follow Christ and to serve him in this world is exacting, yet there is a summit. There will be this exhilarating climax.

For Edmund Hillary and for Sherpa Ken Singh, a few moments on the top of Everest was the limit of their exhilaration.

A few moments in contrast to the many days of exacting time. For the Christian, it will be the other way about. The exhilaration of glory is an experience which, once begun, will continue forever and ever.

And the long climb will appear but a few moments as they look back upon it. And what Paul is saying here in this verse is that such will be the glory, such will be the exhilaration, such will be the enjoyment, such will be the depth of the, and the quality of the eternal life that Jesus Christ will give and will share with his people.

[6 : 25] that the suffering that Christian people experience in this world will appear to be as nothing. I consider, says Paul here, that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

Now Jesus said, and Paul acknowledged, that the fall of Christ is difficult. It could mean, and can mean today, death in certain circumstances. And yet Paul says, I consider such possibilities and such actualities as not worth comparing with the glory that is to come.

And so Paul is concentrating here on the great goal, the summit, if you like, of the Christian life. Glorification. Salvation received in the fullest sense.

Paul speaks of it in four ways in these verses. First of all, in verse 18, he speaks of the glory that will be revealed in us. Then in verse 19, he speaks of the sons of God, that the sons of God will be revealed.

In verse 21, of the glorious freedom of the children of God. And in verse 22, about adoption of sons, the redemption of our bodies. And so Paul is obviously making this point.

[7 : 49] He says it not only once, but four times. And he says it in different ways in order to drive it home. It's like taking a nail and driving it into the wall. You hit it not only once, but you hit it four times to drive it home.

And that's what Paul is doing here in order to emphasize the greatness and the glory of the Christian's inheritance in eternal life. He mentions it four times.

And that's what drives it home into our minds and into our hearts. K.B. Phillips, in the states, verse 19, is following. The whole creation is in tiptoe to see the wonderful sight of the sons of God coming into their own.

There will be this great climate when all the people of God will be exhibited as the bride of Christ to the entire universe.

It will be revealed, it will be disclosed as the people upon whom the Lord Jesus Christ has placed his love.

[8 : 54] This will be the climate of history. Now today, and throughout history as we have seen, Christians have often been despised as non-entities.

But in fact, they constitute the community of destiny. They are the people of tomorrow. And when Jesus Christ comes again and when the world is judged, this will be disclosed to all.

The sons of God will be revealed. They will be manifested. They will be exhibited. They will see the glory of God. We shall be like him for we shall see him as he is.

We will share the glory of Christ. We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. The bride of Christ will be married to the land and will be shown off to the universe.

Now Paul is filled with enthusiasm about this great future spectacle. It will be the greatest spectacle the world and indeed the universe has ever seen.

[9 : 55] It will be the climax of all of human existence. It will be the goal of all human history. It is, it will be a tremendous event so that there is a tingling sense of anticipation in all and in all who will share by God's grace in that great event.

Now this tingling sense of anticipation is described here by Paul in what appears to be a rather strange way first of all. He says that the creation waits in eager expectation in verse 19. the creature or the creation waits in eager expectation. Now the creation here means the inanimate creation. The hills, the trees, the fields, the atoms and the molecules of our creation. They wait in eager expectation and the word that Paul uses to translate wait with eager expectation suggests someone with an outstretched neck stretching, looking to see, waiting to see. You know people in a crowd sometimes are standing on their tiptoes and stretching their necks as far as they can to be able to see the spectacle. And that says Paul is what is happening in the the inanimate creation that surrounds us the earth, the hills, the rivers, the trees and so on.

[11 : 30] This is something that we often forget. that's a point that is mentioned in the Psalms as we saw in Psalm 114 and Psalm 68.

The creation tingling with excitement. In Psalm 114 the hills sticking as God led his people out of Egypt. In Psalm 68 the mountains clapping their hands at God coming to the temple to presence himself with his people.

And so God's redemption is a redemption which embraces not only people it embraces the creation which God has given to us.

the hills shall rejoice and the mountains shall break forth into singing with great joy. Remember on one occasion Jesus spoke to his disciples and he spoke to them of what he called the regeneration which will take place when the Son of Man will sit on his throne.

The regeneration or as NIV has the renewal of all things. And when the salvation of God's people will be complete when it will be consummated it will not simply be it will not simply relate to individuals it will also relate to the world to the physical world in which we live because you see God has placed us over it.

[13 : 00] God has made us his managers in the world. And because Adam was a manager of the world when he fell when he sinned when he went against God God's curse came upon the physical creation.

That when all Adam's children who believe in Jesus Christ and who are elect in him when they will be glorified then that world which was cursed will be fully saved it will be redeemed.

There will be a new heavens and a new earth. But meanwhile the inanimate creation is feeling the result of our sins.

Paul speaks here of it being subjected to vanity or to frustration. It is unable to break and unable to do what it would want to do. It is unable to break out of the cycle of birth, growth, death and decomposition which characterize nature.

Someone has suggested that every spring is an effort of nature to renew itself. But that renewal lasts only for a few months and inevitably autumn and winter follow summer.

[14 : 16] And so the creation is subjected to frustration. It is unable to fulfill the purpose for which God has made it because of the curse which has come upon it because of our sins.

Paul says in verse 21 that it is in bondage to be killed. And a very striking discovery of the age in which we live has been summed up in the second law of thermodynamics.

It tells us that the universe is running down. Appears to be running down. Now this goes completely against the evolutionary philosophy that things are getting better and getting finer and more complicated and so on.

In actual fact there is very strong evidence to suggest that the universe is running down. And this may be it can't be dogmatic it may be evidence of what Paul says here of the universe being in bondage to decay.

And so as the creation waits with eager expectation for the revelation of the sons of God for this great climactic event it is also groaning.

[15 : 28] It is groaning. It is suffering. But this groaning is not purposeless or hopeless says Paul. It is groaning he says in verse 22 as in the pain pains of childbirth.

In other words these pains which it experiences are pains experienced in bringing a new order to birth. The New English Bible renders that verse as follows.

The whole created universe groans in all its parts as if in the pangs of childbirth. And so what Paul says hears is that nature or the inanimate creation is waiting and it's aching.

It's waiting. There is a sense of anticipation. It is waiting to fulfill the purpose for which God created it. And it is aching.

It is groaning because it is unable to do this. Paul develops this twin idea of waiting and aching in two very remarkable ways.

[16:41] He goes on first of all in verse 23 to say that not only is the creation waiting and aching but so also are we talking about Christians. We, he says in verse 23 not only so but we ourselves who have the first roots of the Spirit groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons for redemption of our bodies.

And the same verbs that Paul uses to describe the nature the inanimate creation the waiting and the groaning are used here of the people of God.

Christian men and women are people who are waiting eagerly for this climactic event. and at the same time they are groaning.

It involves suffering says Paul because we live in a world of sin and one of the results of sin is suffering. And even more dramatically Paul goes on in verse 26 to say that the Spirit is groaning. The Holy Spirit is groaning. In the same way the Spirit helps us in our weakness we do not know what we ought to pray. we do not know what we ought to pray that the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express with groanings that cannot be uttered.

[18:08] The Spirit himself groans. And so there is this tremendous sense of anticipation and longing. I wonder do we share it or have we come have we have we have we become so secularized that we're perfectly happy with this world that we're perfectly happy with everything that this world can give us.

And perhaps we have become blinded to the fact that the preacher in the Ecclesiastes underlines when he said God has placed eternity in man's heart. You see God has placed eternity in our hearts and that eternal dimension in your life and in my life can only be met by Jesus Christ and it will be fully met when he comes again and it will be fully met in the lives of all who trust in him.

So much then for the anticipation. what will the realization of this glory be like? One of the great preachers of London in the 17th century was Thomas Vincent.

He was famous for his fearless preaching amid the dying masses of London during the great plague of 1665. He wrote a book which has recently been republished by the Banner of Truth Trust entitled The Shorter Catechism Explained from Scripture.

A fascinating little book. A model of clarity and a concise compendium of Christian teaching. And in that book he asks the question what is the glory which the souls of believers at death do immediately pass into?

[19:56] And he replies that glory will be first of all a glorious place secondly a glorious company and thirdly a glorious state.

it will be worthwhile taking these three headings in order to ask the question what will glory what will eternal life in the fullest sense be like?

First of all it will be a glorious place. In my father's house said Jesus there are many mansions and by mansions he didn't mean a big house that cumbered old house.

The word mansion in the 17th century when the authorized version was translated simply meant an ordinary house didn't mean a big house didn't mean a stately home it meant an ordinary house a dwelling house a home my father's house and many homes I go to prepare a place for you a place a place prepared by Jesus Christ he has gone to prepare that place he has gone to reserve it for those who trust in him and the moment you trust in Jesus Christ you have a place you have a reservation in heaven you know how it is sometimes if we are on holiday in a strange town perhaps in a strange country and we discover find ourselves in a place where there's no reservation and all the hotels all the boarding houses all the bed and breakfast are full a sinking feeling that one has and sometimes some of us have had to spend a night and bench at the railway station there's no reservation

I wonder do you have a reservation in glory I go to prepare a place said Jesus to his disciples I go to prepare a place for you it's a glorious place but secondly it's a glorious company heaven is a glorious fellowship fellowship with God the Father fellowship with Christ in his glory fellowship with the Holy Spirit fellowship with the angels fellowship with all the redeemed and glorified people of God God remember what the writer to the Hebrews said urging on his reluctant readers you have

come he says to Mount Zion to the heavenly Jerusalem the city of the living God you have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly to the church of the first born whose names are written in heaven you have come to God the judge of all men to the spirits of righteous men made perfect to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel a glorious company a company that have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb a great multitude that no man can number a glorious company and thirdly a glorious state what will that state be well first of all it will be a state of singing remember how we read in revelation chapter 5 of that insight that John was given to this glory to this eternal life the emphasis there upon singing in verse 9 of that chapter we read and they sang a song that's the 24 elders they sang a song then in verse 12 we did that the angels in a loud voice sang worthy is the lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise and glory and power forever and ever singing it will be a state of singing that's why

[24 : 19] I think singing is much more important than we realise here in our worship and so often we don't really think when we sing and we sing we mumble our words and we don't sing out and how different it will be in heaven singing the angels the elders all the creatures all the people of God singing a new song singing because they rejoice singing as an expression of the joy that God has given them singing because of that peace and newness of life which they receive and enjoy in all its fullness there will also be a state of sharing rather of serving of serving God of serving him forever and ever in Revelation chapter 7 and verse 13 we read then one of the elders asked me these in white robes who are they and where did they come from I answered sir you know and he said these are they who have come out of the great tribulation they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb therefore they are before the throne of

God and serve him day and night in his temple and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them they serve him day and night in his temple it will be a time of serving and we who by the grace of God are the people of God will serve Christ forever and ever because of gratitude because we will realize then as we have never realized before the greatness of the privilege of being here because none of us none of us deserve heaven all of us deserve to be cast out of God's heaven into the darkest hell because all of us are sinners those who are there are there and will be there by the grace of God and because of the love of God and only because of that because they respond by God's grace they responded to that love and trusted in the Lord Jesus as their savior and so they would praise him out of gratitude it will be a state of singing a state of serving and also a state of growing we read in the last chapter of the book of

Revelation in the 11th verse let him that is righteous be righteous still let him that is filthy be filthy still the writer there is looking at the two destinies the destiny of the believers the destiny of the people of God and the destiny of those who have rejected the gospel and who are described there as the righteous and the filthy let him who is righteous be literally be becoming righteous still so you see heaven will be an experience of development it won't be a dead bore as Bertrand Russell once said once thought it will be an exciting and creative development and having been glorified and perfected your personality will then develop from perfection upwards in a way which we find impossible to trust let him that is righteous be becoming righteous still there will be this exciting this creative development of our potential and that potential will become virtually almost infinite it will develop and it will develop and it will develop and the more we do we will discover the more we will be enabled to do by God's grace there will be no sense of frustration there will be no sense of inadequacy there will be no sense of being unable to cope that we will discover in Jesus Christ and in his life which we will share with him there will be more than sufficient with him that is righteous be becoming righteous still a glorious place a glorious company a glorious state and Paul says when I look forward and when I see that then I'm prepared to suffer now for Christ my sufferings now compare as nothing are as nothing in comparison with that great inheritance that great experience of God's glory and grace Paul suffered more than most as a Christian and on one occasion he described some of his sufferings and I want to read them to you just to bring home the point that he makes here in 2nd Corinthians chapter 11 I've been in prison more frequently been flogged more severely and been exposed to death again and again five times

I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one three times I was beaten with rods once I was stoned three times I was shipwrecked I spent a night and a day in the open sea I've been constantly in the moos I've been in danger from rivers in danger from bandits in danger from my own

countrymen in danger from gentiles in danger in the city in danger in the country in danger at sea and in danger from false brothers I've labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep I've known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food I have been cold and naked besides everything else I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches Paul was a man who knew what it was to suffer more than most and yet yet he could say as he says here in Romans chapter 8 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us Paul had his perspective and his priorities right

[30 : 31] I wonder what is your perspective and what are your priorities now we live in a world which doesn't want to think of the world to come and all our perspective is here just limited by life and by death and therefore our priorities become the things that we can have here in this world that Paul's priorities and Paul's perspective was so different and let us remember let us remember that this life that we're living now will be but as a cloud says the Bible in contrast to the life that is to come so therefore let us get this perspective let us therefore decide our priorities and let us not be like the man described in the back of the Bible Society leaflet which was distributed throughout the homes of Cumber and all this past week the rich fool the man who thought that this life was everything and one day God came to him and he said you're a fool because tonight your life is going to be required of you and you haven't prepared and that man went into a

Christless eternity because you see nothing says the book of Revelation nothing that defiles can enter in and you can only enter into that eternal life if you're trusting in Jesus Christ because his life is the only perfect life and his life is a life which will cover for you if you trust him as your saviour but nothing that defiles will enter in God is not going to allow sin and selfishness which lurks in your heart and in my heart to spoil his new creation and it is only through Jesus Christ that you can enter in that through Jesus Christ you can enter in and through Jesus Christ the door is open to death it is open to all of you it is open to all who will believe and turn to Jesus and that is the good news and oh that each and all of us would have this perspective that Paul had and follow the priorities that he thought when he said I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed

Amen Amen