

Romans 8:18-31 – The glory that will be revealed

“Hey, how are you doing?” And “How are you... really, how are you?”

Two similar, but very different questions!

And there are some answers which probably aren't really acceptable to the first:

Hey how are you doing? “yea, really bad actually, I've felt really low all weekend”

“oh, right ok, sorry to hear that, well let's get into this meeting”

I think it's interesting, “how are you” is probably the question which I've ignored most (not thought about), out of all the questions I've ever been asked in my life.

It's probably also the question which I've *been* asked more than any other question.

I think I'm right that English isn't the only language where ‘how are you’ is no longer a question, but has become a kind of greeting.

In French you say Ca Va? Which means, how are you.

One person says “ca va?” and the other replies “ca va?”

It's like: “Hey how are you” ... “no, how are *you*?”

I guess, even though we mostly answer that question by saying ‘fine’ or ‘good thanks’ – the fact that that is the question, betrays the fact that life is hard, we want to check how each other are doing.

And if you're like me, there are times where the honest answer is, “really not well”, “I'm feeling sad”, or “everything's going wrong”, or something bad like that.

Perhaps there are times when you just really don't want people to ask that question even, because you don't want to lie and say “OK”.

I hope you know the kind of thing I'm talking about, BIG or small and perhaps you can even think of times in your life when for whatever reason, and that's exactly how you felt.

But, although we're not good at talking about it, the truth is actually, that it's normal to struggle at times – life is hard.

Our passage today, from the book of Romans is going to address suffering in the world, and suffering in our lives, and it makes clear that this *is* something all of us will face.

And let me say, as we begin:

- Whatever your experience in the past, church should be a place of honesty where you don't need to pretend everything is ok, but you can be truthful.

- Also, I've suffered, but I know, that doesn't mean I understand your pain.

I've faced a period of depression in my life, I've lost my mother – I've also struggled in ways I didn't feel I could talk about...

But...

I recognise I don't know how *you* feel or have felt when you suffer.

Because other people *don't* fully understand, and they can't be the full solution.

When we suffer... we need the *Lord* who does understand and can help.

So let's see what this passage says, our passage has for us today

A realistic truth and **a reassuring truth**.

Firstly I want to explain why Paul is even talking about suffering.

You see, way back in chapter 1 Paul began a fabulous explanation of the Christian message, explaining in the first few chapters how everyone sins and fall short of God's standards.

Whether we were *trying* to follow God's law or not, we all fall short.

He goes on, keeping God's *rules* was never the way we were supposed to be right with God – it's always been through *faith* – a free gift of God – and it's actually always been through Jesus, who at just the right time, died and took the punishment we deserve, so that if we trust in him, there is no punishment or guilt for us.

He rose again so that if we trust in him, we will one day be raised with him.

And He sent the Holy Spirit to live within us now, if we're Christians, to help us to fight sin, and live for God. That's the book of Romans so far.

But there were two things he addressed in the first half of chapter 8 which leads him to speak about suffering.

1. We are still a mixture within: we have brokenness and sin still in us, *and* because the Holy Spirit lives in us, we are righteous.

We experience that tension in our lives, a battle within us, and that's hard. You'll know it, even in something as simple as the mixed motives you experience when you choose to help someone.

2. If we're Christians, (he says) v17 we are united with Christ by faith. Our unity with him will mean we will rise again to eternal life, *if* we are also united with him in his death.

That shape, of suffering now and glory later – which was true for Jesus, is also true in our lives: We suffer now, and we will enter glory later.

v17 "*if* we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory"

So he's raised the question of struggle and suffering, and so he turns his attention for a moment to talk about suffering.

And he says v18 "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."

We'll come to that verse, but first we're going to work through some more of what he says:

And firstly, he is honest about us and the world

- 1) **The realistic truth – we live in a world of suffering.**

A – the world is suffering and frustrated

B – people are suffering and frustrated

We don't need persuading of the brokenness of our world do we, earthquakes (this picture is from Italy recently) – tsunamis – forest fires... I could go on!

The words the *passage* uses are frustrated, in bondage to decay, and groaning.

We don't need to be persuaded it's bad, or real, but we do need time to process it and feel how awful it is.

Isn't it heart-breaking to see these images, to think of the destruction, the brokenness of the world we live in.

We can get used to it, and forget that this is God's world, which when he first made it was good, it is a tragedy that it's so broken.

And that itself causes us real suffering and struggle.

But v23 says, it's not only that.

"Not only so, but we ourselves, [even we] who have the firstfruits of the Holy Spirit, groan inwardly" We suffer too! Not just the world.

And when you read that I hope you think "yes, that's right, I do, I experience that. I feel like I'm groaning inside because of how hard life can be at times."

And the honesty and the realism is so important, and so helpful isn't it?

God *does* know, it's right here.

And look at v23, *why* are we described as groaning.

We wait for our adoption to sonship – a relational thing, a closeness thing. We feel cut off from God, lonely and isolated – and suffering does that doesn't it.

And v23 "the redemption of our bodies" and don't we struggle because our bodies are weak and frail – they don't do what we want, they cause us struggle and pain.

The world is suffering and frustrated, and *we* are suffering and frustrated.

Some of us will be experiencing that very sharply *right now*, some less so. But all of us will feel it, because that's the world we live in, and that's how we are.

But.

Both for us, and for the world, there is one word which this passage uses, which we mustn't miss out - and that's **hope**.

You see, if we stopped on suffering we'd miss the big picture.

The illustration he uses to explain the big picture, to explain both suffering and hope, is childbirth. The pain, has an ultimate end, and there is a hope beyond it.

I searched, and did some reading on a pregnant ladies discussion forum: Mum's who were afraid of all that was going to come in childbirth - talking with mums who'd had babies already. One lady in particular was very scared, and of course had heard plenty to scare her about how painful childbirth would be.

But one of the replies, very helpfully said – if it was *that* terrible, people wouldn't do it again would they?

And of course, not to minimise the pain, but the mothers *joy* at new life, of holding that baby in her arms – is worth pushing through the pain for.

And for the Christian, and for creation actually – our suffering v22 is like labour pains – as we wait for that time when we will be face to face with God our saviour and friend.

How do we know that will happen, how can we have hope, how can we be sure – well because God is actually the one who subjected it, v20, God is in control and he always has been.

And that raises the question, **does God care**, is he for us or is he against us, if he truly does overrule.

And that's the second truth that's really clear in this passage:

The reassuring truth – God is not distant but at work!

A – He helps us stay close to him in our struggle

B – He helps us in this world in our struggle

If you've been at points where you're feeling really desperate, you'll know sometimes you don't know what to pray – you just don't know what to say to God. You might not feel like praying, the closest you can come, is to just sit in silence, and perhaps think "why lord?" – without even particularly saying it *to him*.

And that is a desperate and isolating way to feel.

But find reassurance in this, look at v26

"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"

Again he uses that language of painful groans – of *course* God knows what we're thinking and going through.

But more than just knowing: the Holy Spirit, who lives in us if we're Christians, takes our pain – and it's *not* that he puts it into words ...

Did you see that, he too intercedes through wordless groans.

Not that he puts into words what we can't – but that God the Holy Spirit himself, comes before God the Father, and speaks *on our behalf* the longing and groaning right from our hearts.

That keeps us close to God even when we are trapped, stumped and silent. God keeps us close to God.

So when you feel like God is far off, when you feel you can't talk to him, perhaps even when you resent him or react against him. God is still at work to keep you close to him.

The devil would love you to believe God pushes you away, but he doesn't, if you're a Christian and his Spirit is in you, he works to keep you close!

You might think – fine, ok, I like that, and that's all well and good. But that doesn't change my situation does it? It doesn't help me in *this* world.

And, partly, I want to say – actually yes it does, I hope you can see that, closeness to God is exactly what you need, in this world.

But also, that's not *all* God does.

v28 is perhaps one of the most famous verses in the bible, and with good reason. Listen to how certain and far reaching this promise is, for you, if/ when you're suffering.

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

I want to say that this truth isn't actually surprising.

People actually think it, who don't know God.

(They've never found Jesus particularly interesting and they certainly wouldn't say they depend on him).

But they still know this should be true. They have an instinct that God is good and that he's very powerful, and they think this ought to be true. They say things like "well, someone up there has got the big plan", and "I know things will work out for the best, eventually". You've probably come across the same thing.

But, instead of just a feeling inside us, we have this statement in the word of God, as a promise to us.

And it says both less and more than we might expect.

The promise is for fewer people than you might guess.

The promise that God is working in all things for people's good, is only for v28 "those who love him, those who are called according to his purpose" that is, Christians – followers of Christ.

And if that sounds unfair, we only need to remember that he invites everyone everywhere to come and follow Jesus, and come under his protection.

So that's not you, and you're thinking I might like that. Then why not come along for a few evenings to the identity course we run, to find out more.

But this promise also says more than we might imagine, particularly if we're going through something really hard.

The promise doesn't say that in some things, or most things God is working for our good.

v28, it's "all things – in all things God works for the good of those who love him"

And the surprise there is that if it's all things, well that includes the very thing which hurts us.

This is actually saying that as you suffer that loss, or as he treated you like that *again* or did *that* to you – things which are just plain wrong or evil even.

Even in those, God is working for your good.

How can that be? Well, in your particular situation, I don't exactly know, I'm just a man!

You could come to me after the service and explain what happened to you, how in your life story you hit these particular moments or barriers...

And sometimes we can look back and see how, yes, God was working for good. But not always, we might not see it, yet – one day we will!

But even now, this verse is for us a promise, that although we are not God, we cannot see all the screens in his heavenly control room – God is. He *can* see all the screens, he is good, and he is working for good.

Let that sink in.

Whatever you're facing, God is still in control. Whatever you're facing, God is still working for your good.

And although you may not understand, and I'd love to try to help you to, we as a church need to help each other, and there will be space after the service, here just behind the screen, where if you want to talk to or pray with someone, I've asked some people from the pastoral team to be here to try and help you to think and pray through it.

But although you may not understand, you can be 100% certain that if you follow Jesus, God is always working everything for your good.

Those are the reassuring truths, God keeps us close to him, his spirit is at work for us. And God helps us in this world too, working everything (somehow) for our good. Even though we all suffer.

And Paul finishes with a reason why we can be sure God is working for our good.

But before we look at those can I just say a few things.

If you're really suffering, please, for goodness sake, keep coming to church – of if you can't, tell Dave or myself and we will make sure the pastoral team knows and we do what we can to help.

Of course, some things make you want to hide and stay away, but it's very hard to support and care for people when you don't see them, or hear from them.

God's plan for supporting a Christian in their struggles is their local church. And we want to be a place where we support each other really well – and where if you struggle, you are always pointed back to him, because God is the one, ultimately who really can help.

Now, lastly – v29, which begins “for”

We know God works in all things for our good, “**for** those God foreknew, he also predestined, to be conformed to the image of his Son... [those he predestined, he called, and he justified and he glorified]”

What does all that mean.

It means once God has got hold of you, he never lets you go.

He is working in his people, changing us, making us more like Jesus.

Teaching us lessons – not always how *we'd* choose them to be – and I'm not going to pretend: that's really hard, at times you might even prefer to be changed less, to be less like Jesus, and avoid what you're going through.

But we're not God, and God always works for our good, making us more like Jesus. That is his true goal.

And when God starts something in you, he always finishes it.

If God has got hold of you now, nothing will stop him from bringing you to heaven – nothing.

In fact, if you trust in Jesus, if you've truly turned to him, your place in heaven is so certain that final word glorified is in the past tense – he's already done it.

It hasn't happened to you yet, but it will, he's already done it.

That is the kind of message you need when you're really struggling.

God will end the pain, one day.

It is hard now..... And there is the certainty of a pain free, tear free, death free, loving, happy existence which lasts for eternity – with God.

Perhaps when you can't feel very much, everything feels dull.

Sometimes this is the one thing you can long for, you want it, and soon.

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

Not that we forget our troubles, or pretend they're not there, or deny the hurt is deep and real. God doesn't forget our troubles, he knows and he cares.

Don't you forget the eternal glory he has prepared for you.

We are to remember: we face painful but passing troubles, on the one hand – and on the other longer lasting (eternal), wonderful joy which will have a far greater intensity than that of the pain we know in this life.

Suffering is a reality for us, but so is the care and help of God.