

Sunday, December 22, 2024 | Sounds of the Season

Week 4 | Romans 8:19-22 | "Redemption"

"Sounds of the Season" is a four-week holiday series designed to help us delve deeper into the true meaning of Christmas. Each week, we'll focus on a key aspect of the Christmas story: visitation, invitation, emancipation, and redemption. We'll examine a passage of Scripture and illustrate that Sunday's topic with a well-known Christmas carol, helping us connect with the message in a more meaningful way.

In week one, Pastor Bob started this series by exploring the Christmas concept of **visitation** and how the God of the universe came and visited us via his Son, Jesus Christ. This is what the Carol, *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing* is all about:

*Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see
Hail the incarnate Deity
Pleased as man with man to dwell
Jesus, our Emmanuel*

At his birth, the Lord was called "Immanuel," which means "God with us." This means the true meaning of Christmas isn't *presents* but the *presence* of God.

In week two, we talked about the Christmas principle of **invitation**. The night Jesus was born, the angels did not appear to the High Priest, Herod Antipas, or Caesar, but to humble shepherds. Immediately, those shepherds went and found Jesus. Then, those same men told others what they had heard and seen. Likewise, we ought to follow in their footsteps this holiday season. Or, as the carol puts it,

*Go, tell it on the mountain.
Over the hills and everywhere
Go, tell it on the mountain
That Jesus Christ is born*

As God's ambassadors, we've been sent to bring the Good News to people far and wide. There is no greater joy than sharing the message of Jesus Christ, especially during this Christmas season.

Last week, we talked about the principle of **emancipation**. The Christmas story is about slaves being freed. Humanity has been emancipated from the bondage of sin and death through Christ. Or, as Isaiah put it, "[In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the](#)

peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.” The **root of Jesse**, aka Jesus Christ, is the **rallying point** and **resting place** for all people. Or, as the carol, O Come O Come Emmanuel, puts it

*O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny
From depths of Hell, Thy people save
And give them victory o'er the grave*

Jesus has come, setting the captives free. As this Christmas carol shows, the Christmas story is an emancipation story.

READ: Romans 8:18-25 (ESV)

¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

The famed hymn writer Isaac Watts famously said, "To see the dull indifference, the negligent and thoughtless air that sits upon the faces of a whole assembly, while the psalm is upon their lips, might even tempt a charitable observer to suspect [i.e., doubt] the fervency of their inward religion." The English minister hated seeing congregations singing songs that did not stir the soul. And so, challenged by his father, he devoted his life to putting gospel truths into lyrics and melodies that would move the hearts of Christians. This goal would drive him to write over

seven hundred hymns throughout his lifetime, effectively popularizing hymn singing in the West. This is why he's regarded as "the father of English hymnody."¹

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Indeed, during this time of the year, it is imperative that we not only *look back* to Bethlehem but that we also *look forward* to Jesus' imminent return. For when the Lord reappears, the redemption of the *universe* will be his goal, just as the redemption of the *soul* was his target with his first appearance. On that day, the seldom-sung third verse of "Joy to the World" will find its fulfillment:

*No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
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As we'll see in our passage today, sin and sorrow will cease to grow someday. Sometime soon, thorns and thistles, tangible signs of the Fall (cf. Gen. 3:18), will no longer infest this world. The babe once laid in a manger is also the Creator who will one day come in the clouds, and soon after, creation's curse will be *redeemed* by the hand of Jesus Christ (cf. Rev. 21:1-5).

Historical background?

Date—Paul wrote the book of Romans during his third missionary journey (cf. Ac. 20:2-3) while in the city of Corinth, which would've been around 57AD.

Setting—Rome was at the height of its power, and as with all major metropolitan cities, it was a hub for vice. Emperor Nero was at the helm during this time. Interestingly, it is unclear who established the church. The most likely hypothesis is that Jews who were present during Pentecost became believers and then returned to Rome, bringing the gospel with them. Given the culture, the church was a mixture of Jews and Gentiles by

¹ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Isaac Watts." Encyclopedia Britannica, November 21, 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Isaac-Watts>.

² Poblete, Alyssa, "Joy to the World: A Christmas Hymn Reconsidered," December 22, 2014, *The Gospel Coalition*, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/joy-to-the-world-a-classic-christmas-hymn-reconsidered/>, [accessed, December 20, 2024].

the time Paul wrote to them, and sadly, there was already strife between the two groups. In fact, eight years earlier, Nero's predecessor, Claudius, expelled all the Jews from Rome over a controversial character called "Christus." Thus, the whole city had already been, on some level, affected by the gospel.

Purpose?

The whole purpose of the Book of Romans is to explain how righteousness is given to humanity by faith and faith alone. Paul's thesis statement comes right at the beginning of the book when he says in Romans 1:16-17, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith.'"

Type of literature?

The Book of Romans is an epistle; it's a letter written to Christians grappling with deep theological issues. We see Paul, as we so often do, laying down doctrinal truths one after the other. However, the book is saturated with rhetoric as Paul tries to convince his readers of the validity of his arguments and rationale.

Context?

The Book of Romans can roughly be divided into six sections, not including the introduction and the salutation. For the sake of time, I'll only mention the first three.

In the first section (1:18-3:20), Paul establishes that humanity is inherently unrighteous and has incurred God's wrath because of that. Not even the Jews, God's chosen people, are without blame, for he says in 3:23, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." But Paul's letter is not all gloom and despair.

In the second section (3:21-4:25), though humanity cannot earn righteousness, it can be made righteous through faith. Using Abraham as the basis for his argument, Paul says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness" (4:3). First, Abraham "believed," and because of that belief, God "credited" him with "righteousness." And the same applies to us. If we put our faith in God's Son, God will accredit righteousness to our account.

In the third section (5:1-8:39), Paul explains that because salvation is by faith and not by works, there is *hope* for sinful humanity; if it were otherwise, it'd be hopeless. He says, "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our

Lord Jesus Christ. Through him, we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (5:2). There's hope because believers are no longer under the regime of sin but under the reign of Christ. As Paul explains, Christ is our new covenantal head rather than Adam (cf. 5:12-21), and through that new heritage, the power of sin, the condemnation of the law, and the tyranny of death have been overthrown (Ch. 6-7). Not only that, through the Spirit (cf. 8:1-11), we've been made children of God and "fellow heirs with Christ" (8:12-17). And it is at this point that our passage is brought in.

I want you to notice two things:

i. Vs. 18-22 – The groaning of the creation.

In chapter 8, Paul describes how, since we have the Spirit of God dwelling in us, we are mindful of the things of the Holy Spirit. In other words, we care about what the Spirit cares about. Our minds have been renewed by the Lord, and so we think on the things of the Lord.

However, a consequence of this change of perspective is that we'll suffer in this world. Those who, as Paul puts it, "set their minds on the things of the flesh" do not take kindly to those who "set their minds on the things of the Spirit" (8:5). Indeed, "the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God," and it is hostile to those who follow God. The world hates Christ, and it hates those who follow Christ—i.e., Christians (cf. Jn. 15:18-25).

But even though we're guaranteed to suffer in this life—i.e., persecution, ridicule, hatred, etc.—this ought not to discourage us. Why? As Paul explains in Vs. 18, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." Present "suffering" is a byproduct of our attachment to Christ, and so is future "glory." The worst that this world can do to us cannot compare to the best that awaits us in eternity.

Paul then shifts his train of thought and talks about another topic: the universe. Note that the word "creation" is repeated five times in our passage. He says, "Creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God." To say that creation "waits with eager longings" is a figure of speech called personification (e.g., "the food kept calling me," "the lightning danced across the sky;" "time flies when you're having fun;" etc.). By taking something that has no personality and giving it one, personification takes something abstract and makes it relatable. Talking about the Fall is hard enough to understand, given its immense scale. However, the correlation between creation and humanity becomes more apparent if we consider creation a person. Thus, Paul portrays the sum total of the universe as a single entity waiting on its tip-

toes for the sons of God to be revealed.³ Paul wants to show that believers aren't the only ones who are waiting for the suffering to end. In a way, creation is also suffering and waiting.

But how does creation suffer? Paul explains in verses 20-21, "For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." What is he talking about? This is a reference to the Fall.

READ: Genesis 3:17-18 (ESV)

¹⁷ And to Adam [God] said, "**Because you** have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' **cursed is the ground because of you**; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; ¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.

Mankind was not the only one who suffered because of Adam's sin. Creation fell alongside humanity. This is **not** to say that the world sinned. Paul said creation was **unwillingly** "subjected to futility." That is, it was enslaved to fruitlessness. The universe does not and cannot flourish because of the Fall.

Why? God said to Adam, "**Cursed is the ground because of you** [emphasis added]." **Adam's mistake reverberated throughout time, not only affecting everyone—i.e., humanity—but also everything—i.e., creation.** Thus, just as our flesh is still corrupted because of Adam, so too is creation in "**bondage to corruption.**" As a consequence of Adam's sin, the earth—i.e., plants and animal life—was ruined.

But there is hope. Paul says, "**Creation was subjected to futility...in hope** [not *hopelessness*] that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." Again, speaking as if creation can "hope" is personification. Creation does not and cannot literally hope for anything. **But there is a hopeful future reserved for the created order.**

READ: Isaiah 66:17 (ESV)

"For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind."

³ Schreiner, Thomas R., *Romans*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, second edition, (Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Academic, 2018), p. 426.

But until then, until the earth is made anew, Paul says, “the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.” Since the Fall, creation has been longing to be renewed.

READ: Isaiah 24:4-7 (ESV)

⁴The earth mourns and withers; the world languishes and withers; the highest people of the earth languish. ⁵The earth lies defiled under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant.

⁶Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt; therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched, and few men are left. ⁷The wine mourns, the vine languishes, all the merry-hearted sigh.

Paul wants us to consider the universe around us and to hear how it *groans*. Just as humanity is marred by sin, keeping us from being God’s image-bearer, creation is broken; it isn’t flourishing. But that will not always be the case. Someday, the earth will be remade.

READ: Revelation 21:1-5 (ESV)

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” ⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.”

Annihilation will not be God’s goal but **renovation**. And it is for that moment that all of creation groans. It yearns for its future flourishing.

ii. Vs. 23-25 – The groaning of the **creature**.

Paul says, “And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.” Creation isn’t the only thing yearning for its renewal. The creature—i.e., believers—“eagerly” longs for the “adoption as sons,” which is “the redemption of our bodies.” This is *not* to say we’ve yet to be adopted by God; we are already his children (8:14-17). But though our place in the family of God is secure, we’ve yet to experience the full benefits of that adoption—

i.e., a glorified body, one that is no longer marred by the Fall. **This is one of the many already-but-not-yet principles found in Scripture.**

But someday, as the Lord has redeemed our souls, so he will redeem our bodies. As John put it, “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is” (1 Jn. 3:2). What is now our present hope will, in the future, become reality. As Paul explains to the Christians in Corinth:

READ: 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 (ESV)

⁵⁰ I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood **cannot** inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the **perishable** inherit the **imperishable**. ⁵¹ Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

⁵³ For this **perishable** body must put on the **imperishable**, and this **mortal** body must put on **immortality**. ⁵⁴ When the **perishable** puts on the **imperishable**, and the **mortal** puts on **immortality**, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” ⁵⁵ “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” ⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the **victory** through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

We do not lose hope; our labor is not in vain. Why? Because someday, our bodies will be redeemed. We’ll be made anew, transformed into a perfect being. We’ll go from perishable and mortal to imperishable and immortal. And for that day, we groan, yearn, and hunger for today.

In verse 24, Paul says it was “in this hope” that “we were saved.” Salvation through Jesus Christ doesn’t mean hope of eternal life in some disembodied state; it is the hope of eternal life in a glorified body. The gospel is good news for our spiritual and physical health.

But Paul reminds us that “hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?” This truth of a resurrected body is not testable by any current scientific process; it is a truth we must take on faith. Not blind faith, but a faith informed by the Scriptures. We believe we’ll have a glorified body because the Bible says it so. Thus, when “we hope for what we do not see,” we must “wait for it with patience.” We can endure present suffering patiently because we know what is coming and how all this will change.

SO, WHAT'S THE TAKEAWAY?

Christmas offers hope for humanity and reality.

Video Description:

Sounds of the Season | Week 4 | “Redemption” (Romans 8:19-25)

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

The famed hymn writer Isaac Watts famously said, "To see the dull indifference, the negligent and thoughtless air that sits upon the faces of a whole assembly, while the psalm is upon their lips, might even tempt a charitable observer to suspect [i.e., doubt] the fervency of their inward religion." The English minister hated seeing congregations singing songs that did not stir the soul. And so, challenged by his father, he devoted his life to putting gospel truths into lyrics and melodies that would move the hearts of Christians. This goal would drive him to write over *seven hundred* hymns throughout his lifetime, effectively popularizing hymn singing in the West. This is why he's regarded as "the father of English hymnody."

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