

The Corrupted Creation

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[0 : 0 0] We are in Romans chapter 8, where we have been for the last several weeks.

Romans chapter 8 is, if you have missed any of this, Romans chapter 8 is one of the most fascinating, it is one of the most treasure-filled chapters in all of the Bible.

It is a treasure trove pointing us to Christ, helping us to understand the work of the Holy Spirit, helping us to better understand what Christ has done, what He's doing, and what He's going to do.

And then we're going to see this morning, in the passage that we are continuing in this morning, that it's going to help us to see and understand the world that we live in, to comprehend why the world is the way that it is, and where it's headed, and what's going to happen.

And so we're going to spend some time this morning in verses 18 down through verse 25, and I want to ask you guys, as you turn there in your Bibles, to stand, and we'll read together. Beginning in verse 18, Paul writes, For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

[1 : 1 9] For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. 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.

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. 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.

For in this hope we are saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what he does not see. But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Father, we thank you that your Spirit inspired this word. We thank you that your Spirit gives understanding. And we ask that we would have insight now. We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. You guys take a seat. I saw on television not long ago, it was a show about ghost towns, about towns and cities that have been abandoned and just sort of left alone for the world and for nature to just do what it does with those towns.

[2 : 3 8] It was pretty fascinating the ways that these towns had changed. And not all of them had been abandoned for centuries and not even for decades. Some of them had only been abandoned for a short time, but for various reasons, either economic reasons or some sort of environmental disaster, all sorts of reasons, these towns, most of them small towns, had been abandoned by all the people who once lived there.

And if they were a town located in sort of a dry, arid, almost desert-y climate, then it didn't take long for them to sort of be just covered in dust and overrun by the arid climate in which they were found.

Or if they were in a more moderate climate, a place where it was greener, then it didn't take long for vegetation to take root inside of the businesses and the homes and the buildings that were once there and then to grow up on the walls before long, you could barely tell that there was anything there.

It was just a lost town in the midst of a new growing forest or field. It's amazing how quickly the world can turn on the order that we have sort of imposed upon it.

We don't think about it that often because we're constantly maintaining that order. We're sweeping the streets. We've got trucks out repairing potholes and doing all sorts of things all the time. We're constantly trying to maintain the towns and the cities and the homes and the houses that we live in.

[4 : 00] But the reality is that the world is moving in the opposite direction. Not just the world, but the entire universe is moving in the opposite direction. Our world that we live in does not move toward order and structure.

It moves toward decay. It moves toward chaos even, you might say. It is a world sort of turned upside down. And if we're not expecting that or if we don't know that that's the reality, then we find ourselves confused at times because we find that things don't work out in our lives as neatly as we thought.

We find that our plans are very quickly thrown in the garbage heap and suddenly we don't know what to do. This is a world that moves in the direction, not of order, not of structure, not of improvement, but it moves in the direction of disorder, of destruction.

It moves in the order of things going downhill, not uphill toward improvement. And this passage can help us to understand why the world is like that. The Apostle Paul here in Romans chapter 8, right in the middle of the chapter, has introduced the subject of our suffering.

He has said that he doesn't consider the sufferings that we endure in this age. Well, what age is that? We said last week that this age or this time includes everything from the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden, so the entrance of sin into this world through humanity, all the way up to the return of Christ.

[5 : 26] So the entire span of human history outside of the little bit of time that Adam and Eve spent in the garden is included in this time or this age. And this time and this age are a time in which we endure suffering.

We face suffering. But not only us, the whole creation is suffering. Take a look down at our passage and notice how it describes the state of the world, the state of the universe, the state of the creation, not just humanity in light of what's happened.

He says in verse 19 that the creation is waiting for our revealing as the sons of God. And why? He tells us in verse 20, Because the creation was subjected to futility.

This creation, this world that we live in, has been subjected to futility, to vanity. Moving on a little further, we see in verse 21 that the creation will someday be set free, but has not yet been from its bondage to corruption.

So currently the world, the creation, the universe is in a state of futility and a state of corruption. And then we are told in verse 22 that the whole creation is groaning together.

[6 : 37] And so the creation itself is pictured by the Apostle Paul, personified in a way as in a state of suffering, in a state of pain and anguish, subjected to futility, enduring its own corruption.

And this is not the world as it was intended to be, but it is the world as it is. And I want us, by looking carefully at what the Apostle Paul says here, I want us to try to understand this world that we live in.

So a couple of questions that I want us to ask. First of all, I want us to ask, What do these terms mean? Exactly what is the state of the world in which we live? What does Paul mean when he says, for instance, that the world has been subjected to futility?

Or what does he mean when he speaks of the corruption that is present in the creation? And then secondly, I want us to ask the question, How did things come to be this way? And I want us to dig deeper.

I don't want us to simply give the simple answer, Well, sin entered the world and that messed things up. I want us to dig a little bit deeper this morning and ask and try to see, What does Paul say? What exactly does he say about how and why the world is in the state in which it is?

[7 : 45] So first of all, let's just talk about briefly what Paul has to say about the disorder that is in the world around us. Just real briefly. I think the most important word that we can key on here, that we can latch on to, is this word corruption in verse 21.

The creation itself, he says, someday will be set free from its bondage to corruption. Now that's an interesting word because it's oftentimes translated as having to do with the perishing of things, the passing away of things.

So it is a word tied closely to the concept of death and decay, so that Paul, in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, can contrast our future resurrection bodies that will never grow old or decay or die or get sick with our current corruptible or perishable.

That is bodies that are capable of dying. And it's the same word that we encounter here. Corruptible or perishable. It means that the creation is subject to death and decay.

That's what this word means. And that, I think, has implications for how we think about the world that we live in. You see, in Romans chapter 5, Paul tells us that death entered into humanity because of the sin of Adam.

[9 : 04] He tells us that when Adam sinned, we somehow mysteriously were bound up with Adam and one with Adam. And Adam's sin was, in a real sense, our sin. So that all of us who are descendants of Adam are born and we inherit a sinful nature from Adam.

But more than that, all of us as descendants of Adam are destined to die. From the moment that we come into this world, we are appointed a day on which we will die. It is inevitable for all of the descendants of Adam because Adam himself sinned.

And we read of that in Genesis chapter 3 of the fall of Adam and Eve as they disobeyed God's command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And we know that. And we think, okay, well that explains why human beings die.

That explains that. But look around the world. We are not the only things in creation that suffer death. We are not the only creatures that are destined eventually to take our last breath and to no longer walk upon the earth that we so often take for granted.

Everything around us dies. Your favorite pet dog will someday die. Your favorite cat will someday die. Everything that you see around you that is living will one day no longer be living.

[10 : 24] And Paul tells us here in Romans chapter 8 that the fall of Adam had effects that went beyond simply Adam and his descendants. That when Adam ate the fruit in the garden and disobeyed God's word there were consequences for the rest of creation.

In fact, I want you to hold your place here in Romans chapter 8 and turn all the way back in the beginning of your Bible to Genesis chapter 3. So turn all the way back there to Genesis chapter 3 where we see God's response to the sin of Adam and Eve.

And of course he begins in verse 14 by speaking to the serpent and then he speaks to Eve. And by the time we arrive at verse 17 he's talking to the real culprit to Adam himself.

And he says this to Adam. Verse 17 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. Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you. And you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground.

[11 : 33] For out of it you were taken for your dust and to dust you shall return. So there are two consequences for Adam because he ate the forbidden fruit. Consequence number one is that he's going to die.

That is, you will return to the dust. So he's going to die. And God had told Adam, in the day that you eat this fruit you will surely die. So God is fulfilling that promise. Death has already entered into Adam's life.

It is now a foregone conclusion. He will return to the dust. But there's another consequence that goes along with that. The world in which Adam lives now is also under a curse.

It's not merely Adam that comes under a curse, but it's the world in which he lived. Cursed is the ground because of you. Now the plants will yield forth thorns and thistles, implying that previously that was not the case, and Adam did not have to face that.

We don't know with any great detail exactly what life was like for Adam and Eve in the garden because the Bible simply doesn't tell us a lot. We know that they were provided for abundantly. There were rivers and streams that ran through the garden.

[12 : 36] We know that there was abundant vegetation and fruit. Yet we also know that Adam was called to cultivate the garden. So it wasn't all automatic. Adam had to work. He had to do something in order to provide for himself and his wife so that it wasn't as if they only walked around and picked fruit off the trees and ate and did nothing and laid around and were lazy.

That's sort of usually the pictures in our children's storybook Bibles when we look at them. Adam and Eve are usually just laying around petting animals and they've usually got a tree or a leaf or something that's conveniently blocking all the things that we want blocked in a post-fall world.

But they're just sort of laying around and life is good and life is easy. And no doubt life was good and life was easy. But nevertheless, we know that Adam was commanded to work and cultivate the garden.

So he did things. And yet he did things in a world that worked in cooperation with him. Indeed, in a world that was gladly and willingly submissive to the ones to whom dominion had been given.

This was a world that cooperated with Adam. Now Adam is in a world that will war against him. And why will the world war against him? Because the world itself has been cursed.

[13 : 43] The ground is cursed. Everything around it. And Paul, I think, is drawing upon Genesis chapter 3 when he speaks of corruption entering into the world. But he gives us insight into what happened in the fall that we don't even get from Genesis chapter 3.

Because if all we had were Moses' account in Genesis 3 of the fall, then we would assume that the only problem that Adam really had to deal with was his difficulties obtaining food and growing crops.

But now here, Paul paints on a broader canvas and he shows us that it's the entire creation that suffers the effects. Not merely the dirt. That was merely representative of the rest of creation so that now all of creation is subject to corruption.

All of creation, all the things that are alive in creation are now perishable. They can, in fact, die. And that's not things as they were originally created to be.

The circling of the buzzards, the prowling of the lions as they stalk their prey, that is not the world as it was meant to be. Yet it is the world that is.

[14 : 50] And if we pause for a minute and just sort of put our thinking caps on for a moment, and we begin to think about the implications of understanding that the Apostle Paul ties the futility and the corruption and the death that we see in all of creation to the fall of Adam, I think that that has some major implications for how we understand our place in the world, and not only our place in the present world, but it has implications for how we understand our origins and the origins of this world.

You know, when we went through, I preached through the first 11 chapters of Genesis. I guess it's been a year and a half, two years, I don't remember. But when we were going through the first 11 chapters of Genesis, when we covered the opening chapters of Genesis, I said very little as we preached through Genesis about those sort of issues that people like to debate a lot, about the age of the earth, and about when Adam and Eve were created, and how long have human beings been on the earth, how long has the earth been around, how long has the universe been around.

Because there's the debate that's been raging now for a couple of centuries almost, really arguing, is the earth old or is the earth young? Has the earth been around for a long time, for billions of years, or has the earth been around for thousands of years, or is it somewhere in between?

And there are all sorts of approaches to the opening chapters of Genesis, all sorts of interpretations and arguments, one way or the other on that. And to be honest, I have at varying times, as I've studied Scripture, I have at varying times taken various positions on those issues, the age of the earth and those sorts of things.

I really have, because as I read Genesis chapter 1, I understand the arguments on various sides of the issue, and I can see some strengths in the varying interpretations of things. And that's just the reality.

[16 : 41] We shouldn't just automatically dismiss people out of hand. It's not the gospel, after all, when we're talking about the age of the earth and those sorts of things. We shouldn't just dismiss people as if they don't know what they're talking about, or they don't love Jesus if they disagree with us on those sorts of things.

But what became decisive for me in my understanding of the origin of the world was not what I read in Genesis 1, 2, or 3, but in fact is what I read in Romans 5 and in Romans chapter 8 and seeing what the Apostle Paul has to say.

And according to the Apostle Paul, corruption, perishability entered into the creation with Adam's sin. And that has implications for how we view things.

Regardless of how old you think the rocks are, it's difficult to imagine a world in which you have millions upon millions of years of death and decay before Adam and Eve come on the scene if corruption enters into the world here at this point in time.

You see, this understanding the world that we live in now and how it came to be this way has implications for how we view any number of things. But I think probably more important for understanding things like the age of the earth or the origin or when man originated or when the world became the way that it is now, I think even far more important than that is just understanding our place and our role in all of this.

[18 : 05] Which gets us to the second question of exactly how did this happen? Because it's easy to simply say, well, the world became the way that it is because of Adam's sin and stop there and pursue the question no further.

But that's not the answer that Paul actually gives in Romans chapter 8. Yes, he ties the corruption of this world to humanity's corruption. But not in the way that we might think.

In other words, Paul does not say that the world is the way that it is because of normal cause and effect factors. In other words, it's not as if God set up a system so that if man does something because man is tied to the rest of the universe, the universe automatically suffers.

That's actually not the case at all. Look closely at Paul's wording. Verse 19 again. The creation, he says, was subjected to futility.

So this is not a natural outcome of cause and effect factors. This is a judicial decree. Who is the one who subjected the creation to futility?

[19 : 25] It is not Adam. It is God himself. God pronounces the curse in Genesis chapter 3. God is the one who declares that now the entire creation will suffer because of the sin of Adam.

Adam doesn't do that. God is the one who subjected the creation to futility so that the world is the way it is not simply because Adam sinned but because God in his sovereignty determined that he would subject the creation to death and decay following upon Adam's sin.

Why would he do something like that? Why would God subject this creation, this world to futility? Well, on the one hand, we're given a clear indicator of why when we're told that it was in hope so that there would be a greater hope to be pointed toward.

But I think we can back up behind that and we can see fundamentally what God's motivations were. Because in Genesis chapter 3, God does pronounce the curse as a result of Adam's sin.

Which means that God issues this decree that the universe will suffer decay, that the universe will in fact begin the process of dying so that he might show to Adam and to Adam's descendants just how serious, just how great sin is.

[20 : 56] We can very easily make the mistake of downplaying the significance of human sin. We can very easily make the mistake of treating our sin or Adam's sin or anyone else's sin as if it's, well, it's wrong and we shouldn't do that, but it's not that big of a deal.

And we can try to not make a big fuss about it. But God wants to show us just how serious sin is. And he uses the canvas of the entire universe to paint a picture of the wickedness, of the evil of sin itself.

You want to know how bad sin is? Just look at the world around you and see the decay, see the destruction, see the corruption in the world that exists around us.

It's everywhere. Stars are dying in the universe right now as we speak. They're dying. They're winking out of existence. And that will continue until Christ returns.

In our own world, the seas rage, the winds blow in ways that are destructive and terrifying. We just celebrated the anniversary of Katrina not long ago, a few days ago.

[22 : 12] What a destructive, terrible event that was for so many people. And we look around the world and we say, why?

Why is the world like this? Sometimes we're tempted to make a connection between those things and sin, but we want to make the connection between some individual, their sin, and the events that happened to them in their life.

And the disciples of Jesus were tempted to do that. They asked Jesus a question one time. In fact, you can turn over to Luke chapter 13 if you'd like to. You don't have to if you don't want.

But in Luke chapter 13, Jesus' disciples asked him a question, and Jesus began to speak to them about an event that happened in which a tower fell.

First, it was the killing of some Galileans, and then it was a tower that fell. Verse 2. Do you think, they asked him about the Galileans, do you think that these Galileans, he says, were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered?

[23 : 19] And the answer is no. I tell you, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or those 18 on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem?

No, I tell you, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Jesus does not draw a connection with these two terrible events. One, the result of some persecution or some human sin.

One, the result of just something, an accident that happened. Jesus does not draw a connection between these events and the sins of these particular individuals. Jesus' point is that you're a sinner.

We're all sinners. And we live in a fallen world. These things happen. They're not necessarily a sign. If you get sick, that's not necessarily a sign that you have committed some sin that you suddenly need to repent of.

No, it's a sign that we live in a fallen world. And God is using all of these things not simply to point to your sin because you're sick, but He's painting on a broad canvas, and He's showing us the entire universe is suffering and in pain and decaying because of sin in general.

[24 : 26] Because sin is so wicked. It is so evil. It is a slight against God Himself. It is a refusal to render to God the glory that He rightly deserves.

And it is so evil that the only way for us to even get a glimpse of the greatness of sin is for the entire universe to be subjected to death, decay, and futility.

He's teaching us something. He's showing us something in this decree. This is not simply the result of a natural cause and effect relationship between Adam and the world. This is a result of God decreeing, the ground is cursed because of you, Adam.

Even the stars are cursed because of you. The animals are cursed because of you. Everything is cursed. So that you and all your descendants might see and understand just how bad sin is.

And in seeing how bad sin is, so that you might see how much greater is the redemption that He has provided in Christ. This doesn't end. This doesn't begin.

[25 : 39] This passage does not begin and it does not end with the greatness of sin or the futility of the created world. It doesn't start there. It doesn't end there. It starts by saying that all the sufferings in this world cannot be compared with the future glory that's waiting for us.

And it ends by saying that this creation is waiting eagerly for something better than its current lot. It's waiting for redemption. It's waiting for the day when God will set all things right.

Verse 21, All this happened 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.

To obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. That is the hope of all of creation. And everything that the universe is suffering now, everything that we suffer now, He says, it's birth pains.

If you go to a hospital and you walk down the hallway and you hear in the midst of the hospital, you hear someone screaming in pain, it makes a big difference whether you're walking through the cancer ward or the maternity ward.

[26 : 53] Because on the one hand, the scream is the cry of death. And on the other hand, the scream is the cry of life. And the Apostle Paul says, For those who are in Christ, all of the suffering in this world, all of our groaning, and even the groaning of the creation itself, it is the groaning of birth pains.

It is a groaning awaiting life. Not simply groaning at the presence of death and decay, but a groaning that looks with hope that life is on its way.

Life is coming. There is held out for those who are in Christ future redemption, future resurrection. And it's a grand and great and glorious hope that awaits us if we are in Christ.

All of this glory, all of the freedom, all of the redemption that Paul speaks of here, it will belong to the creation because God has promised it.

But it will not belong to everyone within the creation. It will only belong to those who have been adopted and await final adoption into His family.

[28 : 05] It will only belong to those who have received in Christ all that is necessary to pay the penalty for their sins and to win the freedom that is held out.

It will only belong to those who have trusted in Christ. We live in a painful world. We live in a world that is decaying. We live in a world that is headed down a bad road, no doubt.

And yet there's a turn in the road and there's life to be had. But you can only take that turn if you trust in Christ. There is no other way.

You can only enjoy all that the rest of creation will enjoy if you are in Christ by faith. This is a hope that has been looked for for centuries and even millennia now.

You can turn back, for instance, to the prophet Isaiah who looked forward to this day. Isaiah 65, verse 17, God says, Behold, I create new heavens and new earth and the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.

[29 : 13] He's creating a new heavens and new earth. That's what Paul is speaking of here. Paul is speaking of the redemption of this present creation. So great will be that redemption. It will be as if it is a new heaven and a new earth.

And then in the book of Revelation, John receives a vision of what that will be like. He says in Revelation 21, 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.

He says in verse 4 that God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. Death shall be no more. So the corruption that was in the world will be no more. Neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away.

The Apostle Paul says, all that will be enjoyed by the creation as they glory in the glory of the children of God.

And you can be there and you can participate in it if you are one of His children by faith in Jesus. Let's pray. Let's pray. Amen.

[30 : 20]