

Romans 8:23

What we have seen so far as we've considered Romans 8:19-23 is that we who are *in Christ* are in some sense the hope of creation. We understand of course that as we partner with God in this life, we offer hope to those around us as we share the gospel; but we will also be partnering with God in our future glory to do those things needed to restore the heavenly places themselves. Thus we see that *the creature* is waiting for our future manifestation in glory with an *earnest expectation*.

Paul will write in Colossians 3:2 that we are to set our affections on *things above*; well, how exactly do we do that? We use verses such as this in conversation and in prayer, but they have become almost cliché in that, if you were to ask someone what exactly that meant, they likely couldn't give you a clear answer. Just set your affection on Jesus, someone might say. This sounds good, but this isn't what the verse actually instructs us to do. We are to set our affections on those things which are above, *where Christ sitteth*, on the right hand of God; we are to set our affections on those *things*, plural, which are above.

What exactly are we setting our affections upon? If Paul comes along and just says that without any precedent whatsoever, how would we be able to even do it all? Well, there *is* a precedent, and it is here in Romans 8. We are to be seeking those things which pertain to that future calling, and setting our affections on that calling. We are to set our affections on those things which are *above* in the sense that we are properly valuing the work God wants to do *in us, right now, down here*, which relates to our future placement *up there*, so that we can actually be instrumental in God's reconciliation of the heavenly places.

We often suffer from the *God-as-a-genie syndrome*—we think everything is done automatically by God out of His omnipotent power. But if that is so, then why doesn't He supernaturally reveal the truth of the gospel to everyone here on earth? Isn't His will that all men be saved (1 Tim. 2:4)? Or at least have an angel come and reveal it publicly to everyone, so that there would be no doubt. No, instead He's entrusted the preaching of the gospel—He's entrusted His will—to mere humans in fallen bodies. And if we don't participate with Him, that will isn't going to be carried out. If God is not going to use His omnipotent power to accomplish His will here on earth in the dispensation of grace, why do we think He would use it in the heavenly places? You can see then why Paul was so concerned with the ongoing edification of believers who were already saved.

And yet God's will *is* being carried out, and it *will* be accomplished, and by doing so in just this way, by *His superior wisdom*, God is demonstrating to Satan that *He* is the rightful possessor of heaven and earth, and that He doesn't even have to use His power as God to fulfill His will.

I say all of this only as an exhortation, because we are instrumental in all of this. It is easy to be lulled to sleep by the daily events of life. But we have to keep reminding ourselves of the truth of what God desires to do in us and through us, and what He's invested in us.

Now, before we deal with verse 23 specifically, there are a few things I want to address. I want us to understand is that Christ's kingdom is not just eternal, but in addition to being eternal, is actually going to expand and increase *forever*:

Isaiah 9:6-7

⁶*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.*

⁷*Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.*

Of course this is written in light of the Davidid kingdom on the earth; it is a reference to Jesus's role as Messiah upon David's throne in the Kingdom of Israel, and how that kingdom will expand and actually affect the whole world. But we know now, because of the mystery revealed through Paul, that Christ's kingdom is not merely an earthly one, but that He, as the Head of all principality and power, is going to reign over all of creation—over heaven *and* earth. And so, this kingdom is going to increase *forever*. *Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end*. This means that what we will be a part of will forever be *growing*. And yet there will only be so many redeemed individuals in that kingdom. Thus, what we receive in our inheritance will be forever multiplying. I want us to think about that. There is going to be an eternal multiplication of our inheritance.

Now, you may be asking yourself, what exactly are we going to be doing? And that is a fair question. Unfortunately the Bible doesn't disclose all the details to us. I think God is more concerned with preparing us than with disclosing every detail to us, and truthfully, I don't know how much of what is to come can really be expressed in mere words. But before we move into

verse 23, I thought I would give us just a few examples of things that we will be specifically involved in.

We know what we will be doing in a general sense, that we will be given charge over the heavenly realm, and thus, we will be judging angels. That judgment is not judgment in the sense that we will be personally executing a sentence against them, but is judgment in the sense that we will be exercising *our judgment* in relation to their activities. And yet there is one example where we may even be instrumental in God's judgment against Satan and his angels. Consider Revelation chapter 12:

Revelation 12:7-10

⁷ *And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels,*

⁸ *And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.*

⁹ *And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.*

¹⁰ *And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.*

We see here that Michael and his angels actually engage in war with Satan and his angels, and cast them out of heaven. This of course is still something yet future. This takes place during the time of Jacob's trouble, *the tribulation*, and so we, the Body of Christ, will be gone. We have already learned from Romans 5:9 that *much more* than simply being declared righteous by God, we shall also be saved from His wrath. This time of tribulation is specifically the time when God executes His wrath against the world, and so we cannot be a partaker of that wrath.

I want us to notice something about this passage in verse 10. Someone is speaking in verse 10, but who is it? Satan goes down to the earth, and this voice proclaims that *Now* is salvation come, and the Kingdom of God, and the power of Christ. Well, this can't be the salvation of the earth, because Satan is cast down to the earth, and God is actively judging the earth. This voice is speaking of the "salvation" of the heavenly realm—the *creature* here is quite literally being delivered from the bondage of Satanic corruption—the heavenly realm is being *saved* from that corruption. Christ is now setting up His kingdom in the heavenly places.

Notice the voice says in verse 10 that *the accuser of our brethren is cast down*, which accused *them*. The voice doesn't say he accused *us*. This voice cannot be an angel, because he refers to the accused as *brethren*. Satan is not raising accusations against other angels—if they sin, there

is no second chance. This voice must be *human*. And yet whoever they are, they are not the ones who were being accused. *Their brethren* are the ones who are accused.

This voice is somehow representative of the Church, the Body of Christ, seated in heavenly places. Satan doesn't waste his time accusing *us*, because he knows we have already received the atonement. Satan *does* however accuse Israel, because until they receive their New Covenant at Christ's bodily return to the earth, to redeem the earth, they have not received *the atonement* or a permanent position in Christ. But then are the believers of Israel our *brethren*? Those that are faithful during this time, who keep the testimony of Jesus and keep the commandments of God (Rev. 12:17), who do not violate their covenant agreement, *are* our brethren. Redeemed Israel is part of the family of God, just as we are.

There's one more example I want us to consider before we move on:

Job 38:18-23

¹⁸ *Hast thou perceived the breadth of the earth? declare if thou knowest it all.*

¹⁹ *Where is the way where light dwelleth? and as for darkness, where is the place thereof,*

²⁰ *That thou shouldest take it to the bound thereof, and that thou shouldest know the paths to the house thereof?*

²¹ *Knowest thou it, because thou wast then born? or because the number of thy days is great?*

²² *Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow? or hast thou seen the treasures of the hail,*

²³ *Which I have reserved against the time of trouble, against the day of battle and war?*

According to the book of Job, God reserved treasures of hail for the time of trouble, the time of tribulation when He judges the earth. We see this hail described in many of the Old Testament prophets (Isaiah 30, Ezekiel 38), but we see it also described in detail in the book of Revelation:

Revelation 16:17-21

¹⁷ *And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done.*

¹⁸ *And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great.*

¹⁹ *And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.*

²⁰ *And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.*

²¹ *And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great.*

And so, I show this to you only to say that the Body of Christ in the heavens seems to have a direct role during the time of tribulation, that we may be *directing* the angelic realm to cast out the satanic powers from the heavenly places themselves, and that we may be given responsibility to oversee things such as the release of these *stores of hail* which are reserved in the heavens for the time of judgment. There will be things that we are *doing*, in other words; there are things that need to be carried out. We are not going up there to strum harps on clouds. We are going up there to *reign with Christ*.

Several lessons ago I mentioned how, in order to properly reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not even worthy to be compared with our future glory, we needed to perceive on some level what that glory entailed—our role in relation to *the creature*, our role in relation to the heavenly authorities, and our role in Jesus Christ and in His body to reconcile and bring back into order creation to operate and function as it was intended to. Understanding that your doctrinal edification here and now has bearing on that, and has eternal consequences, is essential for us to properly *reckon* that to be so—to properly *reckon* that our pain in this life is *nothing* in comparison to those things.

There are different ways people choose to deal with this passage, and different ways in which people define *the creature* even, and even though I think that what I've presented is correct, in the end, the details matter less than the *overall point*, which is meant to do something *within us*. Understanding that God's creation *is waiting for us* because we are going to be given the responsibility of bringing it back into harmony with God's love and character and design is meant to produce a desire and motivation within us to take what we are doing here seriously. This is why several lessons ago I made the statement that in order to properly make that cry of Abba Father, which is the cry of a son who has *perceived* the Father's will and who says Yes—in order to properly make that cry one has to come to see what God wants to do *within us*, and the connection that this inner-man work has to the reconciliation of His creation in the creature.

We can know all the theological facts, but if we never take the time to reflect on them, and come to appreciate that the reason God is doing this work within us is for the purpose of serving alongside Him in eternity, and being a part of His ever expanding kingdom, and allow that reality to impact our hearts so that we see that the work we're doing here has an eternal importance, then everything we're doing here is pointless.

Now, with all of that being said, I want us to turn our attention to Romans 8:23:

Romans 8:18-23

¹⁸ *For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*

¹⁹ *For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.*

²⁰ *For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope,*

²¹ *Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.*

²² *For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.*

²³ *And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.*

Romans 8:23 begins with “*And not only they,*” and we know “they” are those in the heavenly realm and “the whole creation.”. We know that both heaven and earth are in some sense groaning and travailing in pain together up to our present time under the bondage and oppression of sin, and the consequences of sin. And not only *they*, but *ourselves also*.

Now the scripture is focusing in on the only aspect of creation that *has* been redeemed up to this point—the *inner man of the believer*, the inner man of the individual who has trusted Christ for salvation. No other aspect of creation has yet been redeemed except for our spirit and soul, which together form the inner man.

And so we see that though God has redeemed the inner man, we are still left to the course of the present world, and to the effects of sin and the damage it causes. Though God has saved us, and made us new in the inner man, He has chosen *by design* to allow us to continue on in this fallen world, in these fallen bodies. Thus as Romans 8:23 says, *We ourselves groan within ourselves*. You see right here within verse 23 *two selves*; we ourselves, that is, our true self in the inner man, groaning within our physical bodies, our *outer selves*, the outer man. This is a reference to the inner man *groaning* within the outer man. The spiritual man groaning within the physical man. That which is incorruptible and eternal *groaning* within that which is subject to the bondage of pain and death.

Some have the idea that once you get saved, God will somehow protect you from the pain and suffering that is the result of living in this fallen world. But as we have already discussed, God is using *the sufferings of this present time* to fulfill a twofold purpose. God is using them to exercise lost mankind (Ecc. 1:13, 3:10, 12:13), to help them see the vanity of this world as it

currently exists, that they might seek after Him. And He is using the sufferings of this present time for the sake of believers, to exercise them unto Godliness (Rom. 8:14-18).

The reason many are unclear on this issue is because they are acquainted with other parts of the Bible, written to a different audience, under a different dispensation, and find verses that promise physical healing, physical deliverance, physical signs, physical blessings, etc... Thus it is of paramount importance we understand the issue of Paul's unique apostleship *for today*, and how his writings alone, inspired by God, are the doctrine meant for *our direct participation*. And if we approach the Bible in this manner, if we approach the letters God has written to us through Paul in this manner, we see that we are not given any doctrine that promises physical blessing or deliverance *at all*. In fact, what we are receiving is doctrine meant to equip us to not only endure suffering, but also grow from it. The things we receive, and the work God is doing, is not physical, but spiritual in nature. Our firm understanding of this is essential for our establishment.

Now, this *groaning* in Romans 8:23 is not groaning in the sense that we are complaining out of annoyance and frustration. That would be entirely antithetical to the idea *suffering with Christ*, and to the virtues we are here being acquainted with. Certainly the word "groan" *can* mean that, but this *groaning* is something different. *This groaning* is the almost visceral longing of the inner man as he looks forward to future glory amidst the pain he endures here and now. Consider 2 Corinthians 5:

2 Corinthians 5:1-4

¹ *For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*

² *For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven:*

³ *If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked.*

⁴ *For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.*

For in this we groan, Paul writes, in this earthly house, this physical body, we groan—and what is this groaning? We groan in that we earnestly desire to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven; we groan in that we are longing for *new, glorified bodies*, that are free from pain and fatigue and disease and death. We ourselves, in our inner being, we groan waiting for our future hope of glory.

Romans 8:23

And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.

Now, verse 23 uses this phrase *firstfruits of the Spirit*. *Ourselves also*, it says, *which have the firstfruits of the Spirit*. What does it mean that we have the *firstfruits* of the Spirit? The way we need to define this is by actually going back and seeing the way this phrase is used previously in the Bible.

Israel, under the Old Covenant, was to work six days, and have a sabbath of rest unto the Lord on the seventh; they were to sow their land six years, but give it a sabbath of rest unto the Lord on the seventh. And within a given year, they were to observe 7 “feasts,” and these feasts were largely centered around their agricultural practices.

The feast of Passover, though it commemorates Israel’s deliverance from Egypt, actually coincides with the barley harvest. The feast of Unleavened Bread then was a seven day observance that occurred immediately following Passover, also coinciding with the reaping of the barley.

Firstfruits then was the next feast or observance, and this occurred within the context of the Feast of the Unleavened Bread; it occurred on *the day after the sabbath*, and there is some uncertainty as to whether this was meant to be the day after the weekly sabbath, or the day after the high sabbath of Unleavened Bread. In either case, *Firstfruits* commemorated the harvest of the barley as the *firstfruits* of the land for the year.

Leviticus 23:10-11

¹⁰ *Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest:*

¹¹ *And he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it.*

In this system, you either trusted in the Lord, and did what He said, or you were punished. This showed that trust in the Lord was the essential and primary thing. And isn’t that exactly what the gospel of Christ also shows us? That trust in God’s provision through Christ is the only way—and refusing to do so results in judgment? God told Israel that He gave them their sabbaths (plural) that they might know that it was *He* that sanctified them. All of this of course pictured their future redemption in their Messiah, Jesus Christ.

This offering of the firstfruits of their harvest was an offering of gratitude and *trust*, and it was offered to the Lord in recognition that He was the source of all of their blessings. *Firstfruits* were not *the full harvest*, but only the gleaning of the very first of the crop; and their offering up of a portion of it to God demonstrated their implicit faith and trust in Him to bring in the full crop *later*. And so, though they had something *right then*, they offered it up to God in faith, trusting that He would provide something greater in the future.

The use of the phrase *firstfruits* in Romans 8:23 is obviously meant to call our attention back to this observance under the Old Covenant so that we begin to draw parallels between what God was teaching *them* and what is going on with *us*. Not to say that we are under the Old Covenant system of course, but that God has given us something *here and now* which is meant to give us assurance of our hope to come.

In that we have the *firstfruits of the Spirit*, we don't have to wait for our future hope to be realized but can begin doing something with what God has given us *now*. We don't have to wait for the redemption of our physical body to begin serving God, but we can utilize the Spiritual resources He's made available to us now even in these fallen bodies. And as we suffer with Christ at this present time, we are actually demonstrating our faith in God to provide that full inheritance later in our future glory, or what verse 23 here calls *the adoption*.

Now, we have already done a considerable amount of work on that phrase, *the adoption*, so we are not going to reteach it all here. But I want us to notice, verse 23 says that we are waiting for the adoption, *to wit*. Now, this is one of those "archaic" terms that we don't use today, but all this phrase means is "that is to say," or "that is," or "namely." It is used to further clarify, define, or describe something. It is meant to give further knowledge of something. And we see that word within the word *witty*. If someone is *witty* then they're sharp, knowledgeable. And so all this phrase does is serve as a bridge to connect the phrase *the adoption* to the definition scripture gives for us. *The adoption, to wit (that is), the redemption of our body*.

And so Paul here tells us that *the adoption* is actually something related to the redemption of our body. What we discussed in regards to this phrase previously was how the word itself referred to the Roman custom of *adoption*, how a man would be adopted into a place or position as head of the family estate or business, and that Paul no doubt chose this word so as to call the Romans' minds to this familiar concept, because of the parallel it has to what God is doing with us.

When we dealt with this phrase, we jumped ahead to Romans 9:4 and saw that scripture says that to Israel pertains *the adoption*; and we looked at how when God called Israel out of Egypt, He said through Moses, *Let my son go, that he may serve Me* (Ex. 4:23). And of course Israel was given a succession of tests in the wilderness, which they failed, and were then offered the Old Covenant, which was a covenant of works, which they agreed to, and in doing so, temporarily

forfeited their position as sons. When they receive their New Covenant however, through Christ, in the future earthly kingdom, the prophets say that, at that time, they will then be called the *sons of God* (Hos. 1:10).

I am reminding us of these things because this concept of *the adoption of sons* is multifaceted. What interpreters do when they come to Romans 8:23 is say that, since *the adoption* is clearly defined for us as *the redemption of the body*, and because this verse occurs in the context of the sufferings we experience in this present world, then the adoption is a reference to our future resurrection *only*.

But does Romans 8:23 use the word resurrection? It does not. If resurrection was all that was in view, then I believe resurrection would be the word that was used. But because *the adoption* has a wider semantic range than the word *resurrection* can convey or imply, *resurrection* is *not* used. Because it is not the correct word. This concept is larger than bodily resurrection *only*. There is a natural disconnect between the concept of the placement of sons into their inheritance and bodily resurrection. Bodily resurrection alone says nothing of the placement of a son into his inheritance. And yet these concepts are intimately connected in the things which God is revealing to us.

Resurrection is a material process only, but *redemption* speaks to how we are bought back in full for a purpose.

So instead, the word *redemption* is used, because we are going to not just be resurrected physically, but receive an inheritance, a placement, in God's kingdom, and serve alongside Him in eternity. Our placement as sons of God of course *depends* on a new body, but the redemption of that body is not simply about physical deliverance for the sake of physical deliverance; it is physical deliverance for the sake of receiving a placement in the Lord's kingdom. Paul connects this concept of *the placement of sons* (adoption) with the actual repossession of our physical bodies in resurrection because resurrection is an essential aspect of this. That placement cannot occur unless we receive *new, resurrected, eternal* bodies.

Now, we have already learned that we have *the Spirit of adoption* in Romans 8:15, thus, all of the things that we need spiritually for our future placement in glory have already been given to us. We have all of those spiritual benefits *now*. That is how the Galatians were said to *be* sons even though they were not walking after the Spirit and functioning as sons. They were *heirs*, even though they were functionally no different than *children*. Thus, this phrase the firstfruits of the Spirit is essentially a reference to the very same things. The Spiritual things that allow for our future placement as sons are the firstfruits of the Spirit—they are the things we've been given here and now as a down payment, and which allow us to live a functional life in Christ in service to God, and which testify to the reality of God bringing in the full harvest later—which testify to our future bodily resurrection and placement, in other words.

These spiritual things we are all familiar with by this point, and so I'm not going to go through all of them, but the resources made available to us actually allow us to experience the quickening of our mortal bodies *here and now*:

Romans 8:11

But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.

And so, God has made a provision for us to live and serve Him now in these fallen bodies, and yet there's coming a time when we will have, not just the firstfruits, but the entire harvest—we will have bodies that are eternal in the heavens, free from sin, made to serve Him freely.