

Romans 8:20-22 (NKJV)

²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility-

Remember we said last week that the creation being spoken of is our world and sky at least, but it doesn't include humans.

Now here it says that the creation was subjected to futility.

The word for futility means emptiness, futility, purposelessness, transitory-ness, emptiness in purpose or result. This is the Greek word used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word for Vanity. So we have a whole commentary on this word in the book of Ecclesiastes.

Let's take just a quick look at Chapter 1 of Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes 1:2-15 (NKJV)

² "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher; "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

³ What profit has a man from all his labor In which he toils under the sun?

⁴ One generation passes away, and another generation comes; But the earth abides forever.

⁵ The sun also rises, and the sun goes down, And hastens to the place where it arose.

⁶ The wind goes toward the south, And turns around to the north; The wind whirls about continually, And comes again on its circuit.

⁷ All the rivers run into the sea, Yet the sea is not full; To the place from which the rivers come, There they return again.

⁸ All things are full of labor; Man cannot express it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, Nor the ear filled with hearing.

⁹ That which has been is what will be, That which is done is what will be done, And there is nothing new under the sun.

¹⁰ Is there anything of which it may be said, "See, this is new"? It has already been in ancient times before us.

¹¹ There is no remembrance of former things, Nor will there be any remembrance of things that are to come By those who will come after.

¹² I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem.

¹³ And I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this burdensome task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised.

¹⁴ I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all is vanity and grasping for the wind.

¹⁵ What is crooked cannot be made straight, And what is lacking cannot be numbered.

If I were to title this sermon this morning I would call it "Realistic Expectations".

Next time you watch the news, think about the underlying assumptions regarding what is being said.

A political candidate will give a speech and the speech will talk about problems and how the candidate will solve them with superior solutions. The candidate will

speak as if these problems can and will be solved and there is no reason they shouldn't be solved. And we tend to seethe with frustration because we too can see the problems and we can see the solutions. In fact, we are sometimes convinced that we should be involved in the solutions. And sometimes, when we are not careful, it becomes our mission. Don't misunderstand me. This is fine occupation or even interest, but it is, without doubt not our mission. It is temporal and it is vanity.

We hear a lot about the economic status of our country and the European Union and various other locations. And we might even understand what got us into this mess. And there are some people out there with a solution. The problem is presented as if it can be solved and there is no reason that it shouldn't be solved.

We hear about environmental threats. Many of them are very real. The fact that Garrett County has a high cancer rate is probably evidence of the real danger. And these problems are presented as if they can be solved and should be solved.

My job involves working with other people to accomplish tasks. The tasks are complicated sometimes, but we as workers have the necessary skills and intelligence to get the jobs done. Yet it is never done perfectly. We cannot get a system in place that will function without mistakes. We cannot create an environment where everyone is content to work in the current setting. We cannot make people interact without some conflict or drama.

We grow gardens. And no matter how many weeds are pulled, that never insures that one less weed won't grow next year. We cannot make the environment weedless.

I have a few trees left in my yard. Fortunately Mark has cut most of them, but the ones that are left are past their normal lifespan. So the wind can snap them off at any time. And when I hear the wind at night I think of that.

I got the following off a web site:

Entropy: The Second Law of Thermodynamics

Entropy is intrinsic within the laws of nature and physics. It can be described as thus: that the order of things within the world, deteriorates over a period of time. In fact, the universe, as we know it - according to many physicists - is heading toward maximum entropy. That is to say that everything that is within the universe will attain a 'uniform temperature'.

So, therefore, entropy can be described as a kind of quantitative measure of disorder. The law of entropy is the gradual disorder of things within the world and the universe as a whole. What was once new begins to deteriorate over a period of time until it ceases to exist. This is the law of nature, and it happens to everything that we see - including us.

So we see evidence all around us that things are falling apart. And we see evidence in our world that people think they can fix it. Our world believes, for the most part, that the answer to this world's problems are just waiting right around the corner. Men will come together and work out world peace and world food distribution and world banking. The age of Aquarius will arrive and all will be well.

Scripture says, **For the creation was subjected to futility, to vanity, to emptiness, to purposelessness.**

We as Christians need to think through what this means. This sentence gives us a great advantage over the world around us. We are given the inside story on our world. The beginning of Romans tells us the effect of the fall on mankind and this section tells us about the effect of the fall on creation. We know what to expect and what not to expect.

Any hope for anything lasting or satisfying or perfect in this life is misplaced hope. Think about it. Think about the last time you were really disappointed. Why were you so disappointed? I would venture to guess that it is because you placed your hope in something in this life, and the something didn't turn out well. I was getting out of sorts on Friday. And the longer the day went the more out of sorts I became. When I thought about it I realized it was because I am HOPING to go to my Mom's for a few days after Christmas, but some of the things that are happening at work may prevent that. Isn't that how it works? We set our hope on something transient and are disappointed that things fall apart.

The secret to handling your disappointment is to carefully choose what you hope for.

Christ was very specific in giving HIS "disappointment" counseling. He said, **Matthew 6:19-21 (NKJV)**

19 Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal;

20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

I talk a good bit to people who are very concerned about their retirement plans. They have carefully and deliberately contributed to them day after day and year

after year. They have placed their hope on that money to pay for a life of ease when they become 65.

But the problem with their hope is that it is not in something solid. It is as volatile as our economy or the stock market or even their health failing. Those are all things that could very easily happen. So it is a long shot. It is a hope that is unfounded. It is a hope that is just waiting to be disappointed. That is what happens to any hope that is planet centered.

What does Christ advise? He tells us to be careful where we place our hope. We are to be laying things up. We are wired with the need for hope. We must have something to look forward to. We must have something to long for. We need something that gives purpose and direction to our lives. But those things cannot be temporary things. They cannot be things that are subjected to vanity. The objects of our hope must be eternal. And our service must be toward eternal ends. We all work toward some kind of treasure. We all have something we try to store up. And that is the thing our heart follows after. We do well to ask ourselves what is our treasure? And where is our treasure? If it is not in eternity, it is not safe.

The word for hope means- that in which one confides or to which he flees for refuge. David said in the Psalms, some trust in their horses and chariots but I trust in the Lord my God. The issue of hope is trust. Having a retirement plan is not the problem. Trusting in it to bring us what only God can bring us is the problem. Having human earthly plans is not the problem. But putting our trust in them to bring us what only God can bring us is the problem. We must be very selective in our hope. We must be very careful in what we trust. When we trust in temporary things to bring us what we need, we set ourselves up to have very devastating disappointments.

And think about it. What happens when you expect any kind of perfection in this life? You take a vacation to a beautiful spot. Is it perfect? No. A single fleeting thought can ruin the whole environment. What happens when you expect a perfect time with your spouse? You get disappointed. And it isn't their fault. What happens when you expect your training to produce perfect kids? You'll be disappointed. And it isn't their fault. What happens when you expect that your family will always be kept safe and healthy? You'll be disappointed. And it isn't their fault, or even God's fault for that matter. He told us about the curse. He told us about sin. He told us about life. He told us where to set our affections. He told us where to lay up stuff. If we choose not to, it isn't His fault.

If we create expectations in our minds that political chaos and corruption will be solved,

If we create expectations that our country will become prosperous again,
If we expect our stocks will go back up in value,
If we expect that we parents and our children will live long and healthy lives,
If we expect that our battle against sin will get easier,
If we expect that even our fellowship in the body of Christ will be without issues,
If we expect that, in any way we can create a little heaven on earth, we will be very severely disappointed. The best we can have here is the sweet fellowship of believers while both ourselves and our Christian friends struggle with obeying Christ in this body. That is the wonderful respite we are given by the grace of God.

This world is subjected to VANITY. The clock is ticking down. The creation is deteriorating. I believe that those who think that Christians will usher in the kingdom of God and bring it to greater and greater order until Christ arrives are severely in error. I think that a simple reading of scripture shows us that things will get worse and worse until Christ comes in final judgment. This world is subjected to futility. But this world is not our home.

I just wanted to add here that a lot of the tree huggers treat nature like it is some kind of mystical mother earth providing lovingly and mystically for her children. I think they must have never seen a cat play with a mouse. There is a cruelty and brutality in the animal kingdom that is hideous when matched in the human realm. Animals readily starve. Disease wipes out populations when they become too large. A chipmunk is never safe on the ground. There is always something that wants it for supper. So, like Mike often said, mother earth isn't a very good mother. It is subject to futility. To worship it is simply to be a fool.

²⁰ **For the creation was subjected to futility,
not willingly, but because of Him who subjected *it* in hope;**

Not willingly. Remember that Paul is using the literary device of personification. He is speaking of nature as if nature is a person. The creation didn't choose to be subjected to futility. It didn't stand up and say, "please curse me". No, it was subjected to futility against its will. But who is the HIM who subjected it. The two most obvious options are Adam or God. I think the fact that **hope** is emphasized means that it was subjected with a future reason. Adam would not have been capable of such a thing. So I think it was God who subjected it. And what was God thinking when he did such a thing. What was God thinking when He cursed the ground and all nature when Adam sinned? Was he simply punishing everything that lived because He was angry? No, we are given some insight into what God had planned. And we can see that He didn't need to react. He already had a perfect plan in place.

²¹ **because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.**

God subjected the creation to futility in order to, in the future, deliver the creation from bondage into liberty along with the children of God. That shows God's Sovereign plan from the beginning. Now, why would this be? Why would God curse the creation when he cursed man?

We are all aware of what our world is like now. And now, at least a large part of people's days are made up of doing something to gain a way of getting food, clothing and shelter. Imagine what it would be like if none of those things were a concern. Imagine what life would be like if people had all day free to pursue the plans of their imaginations. My opinion is that the curse was needed for the plan of God to be carried out on this planet. God intended for this world to be used as the platform he would use to call His children out of the mass of humanity who are only His creations, not His children.

The cursed creation is effective in making man wish for more. It shows him the futility of his life. It creates pain that may cause him to consider God. And it keeps him occupied during his years. It is difficult to imagine how evil this world would be without the curse. But the curse's purpose will end on the day that God's children are separated out of this world's population. God's children will no longer need the curse. It will no longer do any good. And those who are not God's children will be no more. Then God will set the creation free.

will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Do you realize what this means? God is going to create something similar to the Garden of Eden again. There are a whole lot of things we don't know about our future lives.

1 John 3:2 (NKJV)

2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

We know that we will have new physical bodies, but we don't know what they will be like. They evidently won't be flesh and blood the way our current bodies are. But we will be able to eat. There won't be marriage, but we will recognize each other. There won't be any tears, so we can assume there will be no pain. And we will have a world to live in that will perfectly meet our needs. Life as we know it will end. Life better than we had ever dreamed it will begin.

The creation that we will be living in will be just like us. All the residue of sin will be removed from the creation. The planet will be scourged. Death and dying will no longer be the cycle. There will be no unwanted plants or insects. Everything will be designed for our enjoyment.

Just as in this world, the children of God and the creation both bore the consequences of sin, so in the next world the creation and the children of God will

both be delivered from the bondage of corruption, of decay, of dying, of falling apart and will be liberated, set free, into the glorious liberty that God has in mind for us.

Have you ever considered what we want in this life. I know for a long time I would think about a way I could start some businesses to attain some goals. First I wanted to take care of the needs of my family and church family. But I always envisioned more than that. I dreamed of a life that would involve time that I could spend as I chose. I wanted few demands upon that time. I wanted only the most basic of responsibilities- family and church, but no job related activities. And I wanted enough money that I would not have to scamper to meet any of my needs. Have any of you daydreamed of the same thing? Well, when I look at it through the eyes of scripture, what I want is to beat the curse. I want liberated living. I want the Garden of Eden again. But there is a problem. I have not been liberated from my body of sin. And this world has not been liberated from sin either. So those things I long for would inevitably harm me or destroy me in this life.

What happens to people who have the kind of lives we dream of? They are usually desperately unhappy. How many people in this kind of a position have killed themselves? We see many people who are in these kinds of situations going out and placing themselves back into responsibilities and time pressures. Even they learn that there is no heaven on earth. It cannot be had. So the cursed creation has had a Sovereign purpose. And we have consistently been told not to view this world as our home. This isn't where we are to set down roots. But the liberated creation WILL BE our home. And it will have all the things we wanted in this life that would not have been good for us here.

Everyone there will be kept safe. There will be no threat to our safety.

Everyone there will always have whatever food clothing and shelter we need.

There will be no unmet hunger needs.

No one there will hurt.

We will be free to enjoy each other's company for eternity.

There will be none of the restlessness and discontent of this life.

We will not have that nagging feeling that we are missing something.

There will be no relational conflicts that cause us such discomfort.

We will be known and we will know.

And the new world we will live in will serve as a catalyst for this kind of living.

The curse would serve no purpose there. Liberated creatures will need a liberated creation.

Liberation from corruption.... Oh that will truly be glorious!

We will not just be brought to the state that Adam was in. We will be in better state than Adam. We will have been tested and we will not need to be tested again.

We will end up being what Adam would have been had he continued being faithful.

²² For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.

Now we enter the groan theology.

Verse 22 Creation groans.

Verse 23 The children of God groan

Verse 26 The Spirit of God groans

We live in a world that is not as it was and is not as it will be. It is as it should be for the present. But our God has better things in store for His children. Paul pens here the state that we can expect in the “now time”.

What the groaning is.

To Groan is an audible expression of anguish due to physical, emotional or spiritual pain. The groanings bewail a condition that is painful, unsatisfying, and sorrowful. A cry of deliverance.

From our context we can see that the groaning is sighing about the current condition we are in. We have enough of heaven in us that we long for the future perfection. But we have enough sin in us that we grieve our state now. We are something that longs to be something else. We are somewhere and we long to be somewhere else. And these longings were supernaturally given to us. The world wants to be here, but they want the “here” to be better. They want free from the consequences of sin but they don’t want to be completely liberated from sin. They want to live in a perfect world but only so they can have what they desire. We want Christ and with Christ comes a perfect world. We want free of our sinful condition. We want unending fellowship with Christ and His people. So the world is not capable of the groaning that we do. We have a perfect body coming. We have a day when we will be changed from corruption to glory. Our bodies and our spirits will both be ultimately and eternally saved. And we will get to live in a sinless state forever.

2 Corinthians 5:2 (NKJV)

2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven,

Here again Paul talks about the groaning of wanting the new body. The more we know God, the more we hate sin. And the more we hate sin, the more we want out of these bodies. And the answer comes, not now, but when we get our new body.

Then Peter calls it torment-

2 Peter 2:8-9 (NKJV)

8 (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)--

9 then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment,

As long as we live in a world of sin, we are going to feel out of place. We are going to groan. We are going to want to go home.

The personified creation groans for the same reason. It remembers what it was and what it could be and is locked into corruption for the time being. It longs for more. And it too will essentially get a new body. The old earth will be scourged and the new earth remade for our habitation.

And the Holy Spirit groans in His ministry of taking us as we are and making us what we should be. Even the Holy Spirit will not be content until we are what we are created to be and intended to be.

What the groaning isn't- This groaning being spoken of is not complaining. It is not whining about our circumstances. We have already seen how Paul teaches us to think. We contrast the speck of light and momentary suffering with the gold bullion of glory. So this is not whining, but it is longing.

Let's use an illustration. Let's assume you hate being away from your spouse. That may or may not be a safe assumption, but let's make it anyway. Now your spouse must go to another country for a year. This is that kind of groaning. Every day you live, you are painfully aware that something important is missing. Every day you feel it. Every day you would prefer your loved one to be back. At the same time, every day, you must faithfully carry out the responsibilities in front of you. And you keep doing it. But the doing of it does not make the longing go away. And in reality, we don't want the longing to go away because it reminds us of the one we love. And it causes us to look forward to coming together again.

So the groaning being spoken of isn't the whining of a spoiled child just wanting everything to be to his liking. The groaning isn't the faithless living that acts as if this momentary suffering is completely uncalled for and we resent it. No, the groaning is the realization that we are not yet as we were re-created to be, but we will be...this painful condition will soon be over... The day is coming.

and labors with birth pangs together until now.

Isn't this wonderful?

Let me ask you a question. If childbirth is so painful, why do so many women have more than one child? I would answer it this way. Because the child that is born is worth more than the pain that she endures. The pain leads to something of enormous value.

That is what is going on here. The earth is groaning like a woman in labor. But the labor isn't in vain. The pain is not purposeless. The creation was subjected to futility, but it will not remain in futility. The process that God has placed upon His creation will ultimately lead to something wonderful, something worthy of the pain it experienced.

The volcanoes and hurricanes and tornadoes and tsunamis are just contractions. They will continue to increase until the end. And at the end, when Christ returns, the beautiful baby will be born. The earth will be re-made.

Notice here too, man will be the cause of the world's destruction. But it won't be the way you hear the false prophets of doom on the tv preach it. We aren't going to pollute ourselves into extinction, or bomb ourselves into oblivion. We aren't going to global warm ourselves to death. Nope. But there will be one last human come to Christ. This will be an event that the human race would, as a whole, think completely insignificant. "So what", they would say. "Another person got religion", they would say. And yet to God it is the most significant event in His time table. Everything waits for that event. And that last conversion will initiate the end of time as we know it.

until now

That describes the time period we are in. Until now. Now is the accepted time. Today is the day of salvation. The clock is still ticking down and the head count is still being taken. God has not taken the last sheep into the flock yet. That is all that we are waiting for. That is the only human event that God rests his plan upon. So we live "until now". "Until now" is opportunity. When Christ comes, all opportunity will be over. We will have no further chance to witness of his glory. But we have the chance now. We would be very wise to take it.

So this week, lets look at our lives. What do we expect in this world? Do our expectations conform to what scripture reveals? Are we trusting things on this planet to give us what only God can give us? Are we expecting life to be what only heaven can be? Are we laying up treasure here or in eternity. What are we using our minutes for? Where is our hope? And are we using NOW for its intended purpose?