

**Romans 8:18-30**  
**(Isaiah 61:1-3; John 1:14-18)**  
**“A New World: The Global Dimension of Mission”**

## **Introduction**

The goal of mission, the vision of its consummation, is not of disembodied spirits in an insubstantial heaven, but rather of resurrected persons in glorified bodies living in the new heaven and the new earth. Revelation depicts “the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God as a bride adorned for her husband.” God created us in his own image in order that we might oversee his creation. Our destiny is not to float around on clouds playing harps, but rather to be restored to our original vocation, overseeing a restored cosmos. That is our destiny: to rule and reign with Christ, who said, “The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne” (Revelation 3:21).

To the degree that we are learning to live, not out of our own self-created, misshapen, rebellious, broken selves, which the Bible calls “the old nature,” but rather out of the life of Christ within us, “the new nature,” to that degree we will find ourselves delighted in the things that delight the Lord and brokenhearted over the things that cause God grief. Paul tells us in this text that our lives will be marked by both heights of joy and depths of sorrow, and that we will find ourselves groaning for the mission of God to be accomplished, history to be consummated, and all things made new. This groaning for glory, this longing to share in the life of God himself and in the victory of Christ over sin and death, is heard daily by those who have ears to hear – just as it is heard daily by the living God – if only we will learn to listen.

## **Body**

### **1. The creation groans for the mission to be accomplished.**

Paul puts it this way: “For the creation waits with eager expectation 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 decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (8:19-21).

The creation has suffered the traumatic effects of our rebellion against the Creator, whether we are thinking of God’s cursing of the earth so that the garden in which he placed us became the wilderness of thorns and thistles from which food must be eked by the sweat of our brow, or the entropic effects of the fall in the tendency toward disorder and decay, or whether we are dealing with the effects of pollution of the environment and destruction of natural habitat. The

creation seems at times to mourn its bondage to decay, so that we speak of “the sighing of the wind,” and “the mournful murmur of the waves.”

But Christ has conquered death, not only so that *we humans* might know eternal life, but also so that *the creation* might be rescued from the ravaging effects of sin. So Paul speaks of the creation as waiting “with eager expectation for the revealing of the sons of God.” This is what he means by saying that “the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now” (8:22).

When we see the ravages of pollution on this beautiful part of the country, the destruction of the quality of air and of the rich biodiversity of the Smoky Mountains, we should groan with the creation, and do what we can to resist and reverse the greed and carelessness that lead to the destruction of the creation. We are still God’s stewards and should tend his planet well. But we should not groan as those who have no hope. We groan with the creation for the glory that will one day be restored when God makes all things new and reveals our true home: the new heavens and the new earth, where we will reign with him for ever.

## **2. The Christian groans for the mission to be accomplished.**

So, as we have seen, the Christian groans for glory: for the restoration of all things, but also for the resurrection glory of the children of God. “And not only the creation, but we ourselves groan inwardly as wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved” (8:23,24). Do you ever think of eternity? If so, what do you imagine? Do you envision streams and mountains, rocks and flowers, people enfolded in real bodies? That’s the picture the Bible portrays. Not disembodied spirits: that is but the temporary state of those who have gone before us into the Lord’s presence, and they are longing with us for history to be consummated. They are depicted in the Revelation as crying out, “How long?” (Rev. 6:10). The groaning of God’s people for the glory that will one day be ours goes up day and night.

Do you long for glory? What does that mean? What might it look like? It means, not only no more sickness and no more death – you can have that as a disembodied spirit – but it means radiant, robust strength and health such as you have longed for all your life. It means not only the absence of physical pain – you can have that as a disembodied spirit – but it means such pleasures as we are not capable of experiencing in our fallen state. It means seeing the faces of those whom we love made beautiful and new, never again to be touched by time’s ravages, or by disease and death. It means running a glorified hand through the crystal clear running water of a glorified stream, smelling the intoxicating fragrance of a glorified garden, seeing an unimaginably rich palette of colors in a glorified landscape.

And here is what at last it really is all about: it is seeing the Lord in glorified flesh, this one to whom and of whom we have sung and spoken and prayed all our

lives, this one whom we have always been seeking, whether we knew it or not, for “he has made us for himself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in him” (St. Augustine). An old gospel song puts it this way: “It will be worth it all when we see Jesus, each trial will seem so small when we see him. One glimpse of his dear face all sorrow will erase, so swiftly run the race till we see Christ.”

### **3. The Spirit groans for the mission to be accomplished.**

Here is this greatest wonder of all: Just as we groan for glory – just as we groan to see him and be made like him, his Spirit within us groans for that day to come soon. In fact, when we do not know how or what to pray, “the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words” (8:26). God is longing for us, just as we are longing for him, and his Spirit ensures that the prayers of God’s children are asked in accordance with his will, so that – in a world where things so often turn out badly – “for those who love God all things work together for good” (8:28).

Do you have that quiet confidence of your Father’s love, that “he who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (8:32). What ever you are facing, how ever crushing it seems, you are more deeply loved than you can comprehend, and your groaning goes up as prayer before your Father’s throne, and mingles with the groaning of the creation and the groaning of the Holy Spirit, who takes the groans and makes them mighty prayers of faith that hasten the glory that is to be revealed.

### **Conclusion**

A blind man once came to Jesus and asked him to heal him. Jesus touched him and the man said, “I see men, but they look like trees walking.” Jesus touched him a second time and the man said, “Now I see clearly.” The great Puritan scholar John Owen wrote of that passage, “The first touch is grace; the second touch is glory.” No matter how marvelous has been our experience of the gracious touch of God, we groan for the second touch, and that will be “joy unspeakable and full of glory.”

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