

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Romans 8: 23-25

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank God, it's time to read the Bible again. Let's continue to read Romans Chapter 8. We will read verses 23-25 today.

Speaking of the glorification of the saints, Paul particularly emphasizes suffering; if we suffer with Christ, we will also be glorified with Him. In other words, without passing through suffering, it is impossible to attain glory. In modern churches, there is often disturbance from prosperity theology, causing saints to desire prosperity in this age while also seeking eternal glory. However, in Paul's view, these two cannot coexist; only by suffering with Christ can we be glorified with Christ. For this reason, when Paul describes the experience of suffering and being glorified with Christ, he introduces the groaning from three perspectives.

Generally speaking, groaning in human understanding is negative, the only thing one can do in a state of helplessness. Perhaps sighing over earthly matters is indeed of no value. But Paul tells us that groaning for eternal glory is positive and proactive. Because in groaning, we exhale our personal sorrow and helplessness; after groaning, we can turn to the One who can truly help us, the Holy Spirit dwelling within us.

Yesterday, we read about the first perspective of groaning, which is the sighing of all creation made by God. Creation longs to be delivered soon from the bondage of corruption and to enter the liberty of glory, but it is powerless and can only sigh. It hopes that the children of God will quickly mature and soon manifest the glory of God's sons, so that creation too can enter this glorious kingdom and attain true liberty. Until then, it can only sigh.

When creation sees the children of God contending for power in earthly kingdoms, it can only sigh: like the waves of a great river flowing eastward, washing away countless heroes. A thousand-year-old tree has witnessed the rise and fall of many

empires. Creation has seen that the pursuit of glory within time ultimately ends in futility. When it sees the children of God entangled in politics, whether striving for the welfare of the poor or fighting for the survival rights of unborn infants, their efforts ultimately fail to solve the problems. And in this process, the children of God lose themselves, and creation can only groan.

Creation knows that the true answer is simple: if the children of God manifest glory, creation can attain true liberty. This creation includes the poor they care for and the unborn infants. The real answer lies within the children of God themselves; they do not need to seek help externally. What they need to do is manifest the glory of God's sons in themselves.

Dear brothers and sisters, only when our lives mature, bringing about Christ's return and ushering in the millennial kingdom, will all problems find their answer. Having addressed the first perspective of groaning, which comes from creation, Paul introduces the second perspective of groaning, which comes from ourselves.

Verse 23: "Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body."

Not only that, immediately following the groaning of creation, we who have the firstfruits of the Spirit also groan within ourselves. The term "firstfruits" is translated in English as "first fruit," referring to the first batch of ripened crops each year. In other scriptures, this Greek word is mostly translated as "firstfruits." What does it mean that we have the firstfruits of the Spirit? In the Bible, after humanity's fall, God highly valued the firstfruits and used them as an example to encourage other fruits to ripen quickly. In 1 Corinthians 15:23, it tells us, "But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming." Christ is the firstfruits in the new creation, and through His resurrection, He produced a new creation, thus being the firstfruits in the new creation.

1 John 3:2 says, “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.” Christ is the firstfruits, and when He returns, we will all be glorified. But John goes further, saying we shall be like Him, meaning Christ, the firstfruits, not only serves as our example to emulate but also becomes our prototype. We are to be conformed to His image; we are to be like Him.

But how can we be conformed to Christ’s image? This brings out the second firstfruits, which is the Holy Spirit. This verse says the Holy Spirit is our firstfruits. In 1 Corinthians 15:45, it says, “And so it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being.’ The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.” After Christ’s resurrection and ascension, He sent the Holy Spirit, who is the life-giving Spirit. Through our salvation by grace, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in our spirit, on one hand giving us life, and on the other hand becoming our firstfruits. The Holy Spirit gives us a foretaste, knowing the richness and glory of the firstfruits, while also conforming us to Christ’s image.

Today, we are all still in the process of sanctification, and the goal of sanctification is to be conformed to the image of Christ. When Christ returns, we will all manifest the image of Christ, which is our glorification. Among all the saints, there are some who are willing to offer themselves, willing to pay the price, and faithfully follow the Lamb wherever He goes; these saints are the overcomers. Revelation 14:3–4 describes that among the saints, there are 144,000 who were redeemed from the earth; they faithfully follow the Lord throughout their lives and are the firstfruits to God and to the Lamb among the saints.

When Christ returns, all the saints will be raptured and transformed, receiving glory. James 1:18 says, “Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.” When the saints are glorified, they become the firstfruits among creation.

Here, we see that in God’s ordination, there is an order to the firstfruits. First, Christ is the firstfruits in the new creation. Second, the Holy Spirit is the firstfruits within us, giving us a foretaste and aiding our sanctification. Third, the overcoming saints

are the firstfruits among the saints. Fourth, all the saints are the firstfruits among creation. We who have the firstfruits of the Spirit also groan within ourselves. In the original text, there is no word for “heart”; it is “groan within ourselves,” meaning this groaning begins in our spirit and extends to our soul.

What do we groan for? Waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. Christ is the firstfruits in the new creation, and the richness and glory of this firstfruits are already in the Holy Spirit, dwelling within us as our foretaste. Moreover, we have the four Gospels, recording Christ’s life and deeds on earth. We know we should imitate Christ and receive the supply of the Holy Spirit to be conformed to His image. We truly desire and long to complete this sanctification process soon and reach the state of glory.

But our body is still in the old creation, gradually decaying, often subject to Satan’s temptations and the world’s allurements, which disrupt our sanctification process. Thus, from the longing in our spirit to the helplessness in our soul, we can only groan. Perhaps our longing is not yet earnest enough, or our cries to the Lord are not urgent enough. Why does the Lord continually delay His return?

Dear brothers and sisters, salvation is a long process. In 2 Corinthians 1:10, Paul says: “Who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us.” Paul clearly tells us that Christ has delivered us from so great a death—this is the salvation of our spirit, our spirit’s regeneration, receiving eternal life, no longer subject to the judgment of the lake of fire; this has already happened.

We are currently experiencing the salvation of our soul, walking on the path of sanctification. In our soul, we partake of God’s nature and bear the fruit of the Spirit; this is happening now. But the completion of salvation is in the future, when Christ returns, we will receive the adoption, and our body will be redeemed. That is, we will lay aside this mortal body and receive a spiritual body, then we will manifest the glory of God’s sons, with no more tears, sorrow, pain, or death, and we will be with God forever—what a wonderful prospect.

Verse 24: “For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?”

We were saved in this hope; the Chinese Union Version’s translation is somewhat vague, but the NIV is more direct: “we were saved for this hope.” In Ephesians 2:8, it says: “For by grace you have been saved through faith.” Jesus Christ has completed salvation, and whoever is willing to accept it can receive it. In us, salvation begins with faith, and Romans 8:24 tells us that the goal of salvation is the hope of the redemption of our body. In 1 Corinthians 13:13, it says, “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three.” Faith is the starting point of our salvation; hope is the goal of our salvation; and throughout the entire process of salvation, there is love.

Continually experiencing the Triune God’s cooperative work for our salvation, richly supplying us with love—this includes the Father’s election and predestination in love, Christ’s redemption, sanctification, and glorification in love, and the Holy Spirit’s sealing and pledge in love. With the supply and support of love, we can reach the goal of salvation, receiving the adoption and the redemption of our body.

But hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? Paul knows that in waiting, people easily become weak and tend to grasp things attainable now. Therefore, Paul emphasizes that what we hope for is not something we can see or touch today. For what we hope for far exceeds what we ask or think.

Paul warns us not to fall into Satan’s trap, as Satan often uses things we can see and touch today to lure us away from God’s path. Sometimes, he even uses things we think are biblical to entice God’s children to pursue worldly justice and righteousness, but these are Satan’s snares. Even the best systems, in the hands of sinful people, become tools for personal gain. True justice and righteousness can only be achieved in the millennial kingdom when Christ reigns.

Christ’s return depends on whether the church is built and whether the saints have grown to maturity. The things we can see today are not our hope. In 2 Corinthians 4:18, Paul declares directly, “While we do not look at the things which are seen, but

at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” We must repeatedly remind ourselves that what is seen is temporary. Therefore, we need not rejoice when we gain them nor regret when we lose them, for they are temporary. What is unseen is eternal, including our sanctification today and our glorification in the future—these hold the highest value.

Verse 25: “But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.”

We must hope for what is unseen, which is a lesson in faith. Many saints, lacking faith, place their hope in things visible and tangible in this life, resulting in a lifetime of striving. If they attain them, they still feel empty and disappointed; if they do not, they become angry and resentful, and from beginning to end, it is vanity of vanities, like grasping shadows or chasing the wind. Paul once again reminds the saints to hope for what is unseen.

Throughout history, churches in affliction have turned their eyes to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, and waited for Christ’s glorious return. In this waiting process, perseverance is needed. Today, we are in the last days, and Christ’s return is drawing near. Perhaps the afflictions and conflicts around us will intensify, and we need perseverance all the more, for those who endure to the end will be saved.

I would like to conclude with a hymn by Watchman Nee about waiting for the Lord’s return, from “The Glorious Hope, From Bethany,” stanza 5 to 7:

Could’st Thou, O Lord, forget Thy word of promise,
Soon to return and take me unto Thee?
Yet day by day and year by year I’ve waited,
And still I wait, and no return I see!

Remember, Lord, the years I have been waiting
While Thy dear footsteps linger far away.
How long? How long? Oh! must I wait still longer,
Till Thou shalt come again in glorious array?

From generation unto generation
Thy saints have come and gone, but have not seen
Thy glorious promise pass into fulfillment.
How long, how very long the time has been!
Why cannot we, dear Lord, discern Thy footsteps?
Why are the heavens still so closely sealed?
Oh! must our waiting be prolonged still further
Before Thou in Thy matchless splendor art revealed?

Lord, I recall the many years I've waited
For Thy return — yet, Lord, not I alone,
But Thy dear saints through many generations —
Beseeching Thee to come back for Thine own.
To countless tears and countless fervent pleadings
By Thine appearing haste to make reply.
Oh, may Thou come, the echo of the ages,
Come, come and answer now this mighty corp'rate cry!

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, thank You! Through Your completed redemption and sending the Holy Spirit to dwell in us, we have tasted the richness and glory of the firstfruits, and our hearts so long to receive the adoption soon. But we still live in this world today, and we know the sanctification process is not yet complete; we still need to pass through more afflictions. Many times, seeing our slow growth, we cannot help but groan. Lord, have mercy on us; Lord, help us! Enable us to truly be delivered from this mortal body. We know that by ourselves, we cannot overcome many things. Lord, remember that we truly love You, and we

truly hope for Your return. In the waiting process, grant us enduring perseverance, that we may encourage one another with the saints in the church, build Your body together, and welcome Your return. Bless the church I am in. I pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.