

REACH 2021

The World is Waiting

Romans 8:19-25

Mark Vroegop

“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 were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience” (Rom. 8:19–25).

The next time you make your way into the Atrium, the space just outside the Sanctuary, take a minute a look at words on the bulkhead that wraps around the Sanctuary. What you’ll see are our Core Values. These six phrases summarize the unique way that we try to live out our calling as church.

It’s both who we’ve been, who we are, and who we are going to be.

Those values have always been important, but they are even more critical right now because they serve to anchor us, reassure us, and remind us what’s central to who we are as a church. Our values are:

- Pre-eminence of Jesus
- Authority of the Word
- Redemptive Community
- Biblical Unity in Diversity
- Extravagant Grace
- Call to Go

Now, these are really important right now because they help keep us grounded and focused as things change. Do you feel the stress of feeling like everything’s changing? A church member recently described it as akin to the feeling of having just moved. I remember when we moved to Indianapolis, my wife told me that her goal was to “move and not sin.” Why would she say that? Because moving involves enormous stress with a new city, new friends, new school, new church, etc. The church member said to me, “I haven’t changed houses but I feel like I just moved. Everything’s new and uncomfortable. What’s more: we all moved.”

How true. And that's why these values matter. This is who we are as a church. These reflect the unique grace of God. It's the why behind the what of "igniting a passion to follow Jesus." For example:

- The Pre-eminence of Jesus is why we try to connect every sermon to the gospel
- The Authority of the Word is why we walk through a particular text in the Bible and why we are resuming our study in Isaiah, with a message from Isaiah 40, next week
- Redemptive Community is why we want you to join the church and find a group or class for connection
- Biblical Unity in Diversity is why we try to distinguish between doctrinal essentials and non-essentials; it's also why ethnic harmony and reconciliation are important
- Extravagant Grace is why one of every three dollars we steward as a church is spent outside of ourselves
- The Call to Go is why we're constantly thinking about neighbors, our city, and the world

These are the biblical and philosophical values that are constant. As the world changes, as the issues change, and as our church responds to those changes; these values stay the same. The expression or application of these values needs to be flexible. But the importance of the value is fixed.

For the last two weeks, we've focused the spotlight of our attention on the final value, The Call to Go, with a global emphasis. I love these weeks because they help remind me what I know to be true, but I tend to forget. I know God is working around the world. I know that we're called to reach the nations. But REACH helps connect my heart to what I believe and value.

As we wrap up these three Sundays, I'd like for us to consider some lessons from the eighth chapter of Romans and what we can learn from this passage about the world. My goal in choosing this text was to help us keep perspective, broaden our horizons, and think globally. This text will help us live more on mission highlight three characteristics of the world.

1. The World is Waiting (v 19)

The book of Romans, as we heard last week, was written as a missionary support letter. The apostle Paul felt a calling to preach the gospel in Spain (Rom. 15:22). After he delivered a financial gift to the needy in Jerusalem, he planned to visit Rome and ask the church there to help him financially.

There's some convincing evidence outside of the Bible that Paul eventually made it to Spain.¹ But it's important to remember that one of the most theologically-rich books in the New Testament had a missions focus. Theology fuels missiology.

A big view of God means you'll have a big view of the mission of God in the world. Churches who fail to see the world have not only failed in missions; they've failed in theology.

¹ <https://www.biola.edu/blogs/good-book-blog/2015/paul-s-4th-missionary-journey-and-i-don-t-mean-his-trip-to-rome>

The eighth chapter of Romans is about the connection between a believer's spiritual position and how to live in the world by the Spirit (see Rom. 8:3 and 12). In 8:18, Paul specifically addresses the issue of suffering. Believers in Jesus see things differently.

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18).

But that's not all they see differently. They also see the world through different eyes. And it's this vision that should be a motivator for living on mission. Verse 19 tells us that the creation is waiting with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. Suffering is hard because it asks us to weigh what is really, truly, and eternally valuable. So often, we settle for a lesser glory, or we have such strong feelings for lesser glories. Christian suffering calls us to "do the math" when it comes to the beauty of God.

It's not just believers who are waiting for the "Great Revealing," but also the entire created order. All are waiting "with eager longing for the revealing of the Sons of God." This refers to the moment when the plan of God is complete.

It's really important and deeply biblical to understand that there is a macro plan—a sovereign plan that God is unfolding. This text reminds us that our suffering is not entirely about us. We are not the only ones waiting for relief! The entire created order is waiting and longing for the restoration.

Given the context, Paul is talking more broadly than just individuals. He pictures the created world as waiting with hushed expectancy for what's yet to come.² We are living in a world that is waiting. We live in a world where we see beauty, grandeur, and awe. And right behind it or next to it is ugliness, brokenness, and horror. We live in a world with life, laughter, and joy. But we also live in a world with death, tears, and grief.

The Bible calls this in-between life "waiting." We are alive. We are doing things. The sun rises and sets. Days, weeks, and years are spent. And yet the whole creation is waiting—recognizing that there's something yet to come. There must be something more. How do the dots of life connect?

C.S. Lewis described this as myth—a deep longing for something transcendent and while not entirely accessible in our present experience, is deeply fulfilling.³ Think of it as a way to make sense of the world. Everyone needs answers to big questions like "Who is God?", "What is wrong with

² Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 321.

³ https://pillars.taylor.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1091&context=inklings_forever

the world?”, “How are sins forgiven?”, and “What happens when we die?” These are “waiting questions.”

And the reason that global missions exists is to provide God’s answers to those questions. Sadly, there are billions of people in the world who have no hope because of how they answer those questions. For example, when it comes to salvation here’s how much of the world thinks:

- Muslim: practice and repeat the five pillars of Islam (fasting, pilgrimage, giving alms, prayer, and confessing Muhammed as the prophet), but you’re never quite sure you’ve done enough
- Hindu: eliminate all the evil in your life until you are pure enough to merge with Brahma
- Buddhist: remove desire leading to eternal bliss
- Jewish: obey the Jewish laws and customs
- Pagan: appease the gods and spirits in order to be rewarded

These are just a few of the ways that humans make sense of the world as we wait. But you can imagine how hopeless the other religions are and how the enemy uses them to entrap people. What a contrast to the message of Romans 8:1.

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:1–2).

2. The World Is Broken (vv. 20-21)

The second characteristic of the world is its brokenness. But, as we see in the text, it’s not without purpose.

When you read verse 20, you should note the word “futility.” The word means empty, purposeless, folly, or vanity. It’s a word used in Romans 1:21 to describe the broken desires and thinking that leads to godless actions.

“For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things” (Rom. 1:21–23).

This futility is part of the entire created order. The disobedience of Adam and Eve brought sin into the world. Genesis 3 records the curse upon the ground:

“[C]ursed in 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...by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground” (Gen. 3:17-18).

The earth is not the way that it is supposed to be. Sin has fundamentally perverted the place where we live. And when we get a sense of the futility and brokenness of the world, it’s a reminder that it’s because of something else. Brokenness is a consequence of sin.

The text says as much. Take note of the phrases “the creation was subjected. . .not willingly.” The curse and its effects were not the created order’s choice. It was received. God, in response to sin, was the one who subjected the created order to suffering. This was meant to be a warning that something’s wrong with the world. The world is in bondage to corruption.

Verse 21 explains that the creation is longing for deliverance from “its bondage to decay” or futility or the curse of sin. In other words, the entire created order longs for the brokenness to come to end. We long for the end of death, terminal illnesses, dysfunctional families, marital break-ups, viruses that make us sick or the people who put them in our computers, and all kinds of other maladies connected with the human race.

But this is only part of the story. Paul makes this aspect very clear because he also wants the hope to be clear. This futility is not pointless because the text talks about hope. The passage says that God subjected it to futility in hope.

The brokenness of the world points to something more. That begs a question: When you encounter the brokenness of the world, do you see it through the lens of gospel hope? Last week, Nate shared a map that I know many of us have seen before. It shows the places where most of the 3.28 billion unreached people live. This is an important map to remember. But it doesn’t fully help us to feel the urgency or the immensity of the need. We don’t feel the lostness of the world.

One of the reasons we dedicate several Sundays a year to missions is for the purpose of stoking the flames of what you feel about missions. It’s one thing to know that the world is lost. It’s another to feel it—deeply.

A few weeks ago, I told you my nickname for Pastor Nate is The Missions Stud. The reason is because I’ve traveled all over the world with Nate on Vision Trips. A few examples:

- We prayed over the newly purchased property in Northern Togo where the Hospital of Hope is now serving unreached people from Central Africa.
- He took me on a tour of a seminary dorm in India where we talked with students desperate to return home to preach the gospel.
- We’ve taught together at a small Bible institute in Nagpur, India.
- I learned how to pray for a meal in a country where it would be unwise to bow our heads and close our eyes.
- He reassured me when I saw a few thousand Muslim men dressed for Hajj lining up at the airport. He negotiated a visit inside a Mosque despite a very aggressive worshipper who was worried that we’d defile it. He kept track of me as we walk through a packed market and as I said, “Are you sure we should be here?”

- I've stood on a balcony and looked over a city where there was no gospel witness for a thousand years with tears in my eyes, realizing our church was part of changing.
- We sat in a thatched-roof hut in the most primitive village I'd ever seen in Cambodia and listened to a man tell us about how he came to faith and planted a house church.
- I sat in a living room as leaders of a house church thanked him with tears for the new translation of the Bible that College Park helped fund.

It's been said that the heart cannot taste what the eyes have not seen. Maybe a better way to say that is the heart cannot feel what the eyes have not seen. It's one thing to know about the brokenness of the world; it's another to see it.

That's one reason why you should consider a Vision Trip this next year. It might be good for your soul to see the fields again.

3. The World Is Incomplete (vv. 22-25)

The final characteristic of the world is its incompleteness. There's a sense that something is happening. There's movement, but it's also traumatic. But it's painful. Paul captures this with his statement, "the whole creation has been groaning together in childbirth" (v.22).

He uses this imagery to help us remember that something painful but something good is happening. In the context of Romans 8, Paul is trying to help these believers understand suffering differently. He wants them to connect their hardship to the purposes of God in their lives.

In verses 23-24, he speaks to this very issue as believers are "groaning" as they wait for the final step in their redemption. And that's our posture—even now. We know the story God is writing. We know the plan of redemption.

We know that one day Jesus is going to return and make everything right. We see everything with a different set of eyes. It looks beyond the present circumstances with the eyes of faith. What we believe affects what we see. We look to the work of God, the big picture of what he is accomplishing, and a plan that is beyond the reach of our minds.

It hears the groaning brokenness. And we wait with patience. But this doesn't mean inactivity, passivity, or pessimism. Waiting with patience means that our theology informs what we do. It means that we know the story of God's redemptive plan, and we live in light of God's plan to save sinners and restore a broken world. It means that we live with the end in mind—remembering that this world is groaning and incomplete.

How does this relate to missions? I'd like to offer a caution and an invitation. The caution is that this is a season of history where it would be easy to live in personal survival mode because you are groaning. And it's important to remember that the entire world is groaning. This is a great time to be a Christian if we'll act and think like Christians. But we've got to intentionally take some steps, or we'll slip into a season of self-focus.

Two weeks ago, Nate shared a graphic that identified our strategy for missions. Our partnerships and missionaries are vital. But it takes the local church—through going, giving, and prayer—to fuel missions movements. I want to encourage you to consider taking one step—as you wait with patience—to reconnect your heart to what you believe.

One of our goals for REACH is to increase the number of people in our Barnabas Prayer Teams. This is simply a group of people who meet to encourage and pray for one of our missionaries.

This could be a simple way for you to regularly link your actions with what you believe. And we're making it super easy. Simply visit our Global Outreach webpage for more information about what teams might be a good fit for you.

The world waiting. The world is broken. The world is incomplete. Since theology fuels missiology, "the call to go" must be more than merely a core value.

It's a vital way to live as we wait with patience for the Lord's return.

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