

ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO YOUR FUTURE?

Romans 8:18-25

Randy Alcorn states in his book, *Heaven*, that many Christians find no joy at all when they think about Heaven. He writes:

A pastor once confessed to me, "Whenever I think about Heaven, it makes me depressed. I'd rather just cease to exist when I die."

"Why?" I asked.

"I can't stand the thought of that endless tedium. To float around in the clouds with nothing to do but strum a harp... it's all so terribly boring. Heaven doesn't sound much better than Hell. I'd rather be annihilated than spend eternity in a place like that."¹

Gary Larson captured this common misconception of the afterlife in this cartoon:

When an English vicar was asked by a colleague what he expected after death, he replied, "Well, if it comes to that, I suppose I shall enter into eternal bliss, but I really wish you wouldn't bring up such depressing subjects."²

I hope heaven and the afterlife are not a "depressing subject" to you. Far from depressing, heaven and the afterlife were the hope that pulled the Apostle Paul through his sufferings. And so should they be the hope that pulls us through as well.

As we open our Bibles to Romans 8:18-25 we are in that portion of Paul's letter dealing with the second aspect of our salvation – *sanctification*. *Sanctification* is the lifelong process of spiritual transformation in which God is healing our brains, setting us free from self-centeredness and fear and changing our character all to the end of making us more and more like Jesus Himself.

The process of sanctification is difficult. We want to live for God and obey Him, but self-centeredness and fear sabotage our godly desires. The Apostle Paul himself expressed the struggle of sanctification in Romans 7:21-25 where he cries out:

²⁴ *Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*

Romans 8 is God's answer to Paul's question.

At the heart of God's answer are a number of assurances; assurances that give us confidence God is for us and with us in the victories and failures of sanctification. He assures us...

- There is no condemnation from God if and when we sin (8:1-4).
- The Holy Spirit has brought us into a new living arrangement in which He is pumping God's life into us (8:2-13).
- Through the Holy Spirit we are cherished children (8:14-17).
- When we sin, the Spirit encourages us to draw near, not fear, our heavenly Father (8:15-16).
- As adopted children we are heirs and co-heirs with Christ (8:17).
- Our present suffering will give way to eternal glory (8:17).

Far from depressing us, God intends the hope of glory to pull us through this present life of suffering.

¹ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*. Carol Stream: Tyndale. 2004. pp. 5-6.

² Ibid. p. 6.

Paul writes in verses 18-25:

Romans 8:18–25 (ESV)

18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

This is an extraordinary statement from a man who suffered greatly for Christ (2 Corinthians 11:22-29). As he turned things over in his mind, Paul realized the eternal glory of the future makes his earthly sufferings seem like nothing.

Childbirth is like that. God blessed Cathy and I with three wonderful children. Cathy literally never talks about the pain of labor and delivery. It's a none issue; the pain was swallowed up in the joy of safely bringing each of our babies into this world.

All the pain and suffering of living in this sin fallen world will be swallowed up by the glory God is going to reveal to us in the next life. Our joy will be greater still because creation itself will be set free from its suffering.

19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. **20** For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope **21** 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. **22** For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

God gave Adam dominion over creation. When Adam sinned and came under the curse, creation also came under the curse. Disease, death and decay infected the plant kingdom and animal kingdom. Nature became a dangerous place. Rattlesnakes and black widows. Poison oak and oleander. Fires and floods.

But at the same time, creation is breathtakingly beautiful, even in its fallen state. What will it be like when creation is completely free of the curse?

Just as the curse of creation was tied to man's fall so also creation's liberation will be tied to man's glorification. I believe the liberation of creation will occur at the time of the Millennial Kingdom when Christ reigns on earth as King of Kings and the Old Testament, New Testament and Tribulation Saints have all been resurrected and received the redemption of their bodies (Isaiah 11:1-9; 65:17-25).

The *glory to be revealed to us* is centered in the redemption of our bodies – our resurrection bodies. This is the ultimate solution to Romans 7:24. God will deliver us from these bodies of death by giving us bodies free from the influence of sin. It is glory in that we will finally be all that God created us to be in both spirit and body. We will love as God loves. We will be free from ourselves to be God-centered and other-centered.

23 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. **24** For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? **25** But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

This is our future. This is the third aspect of our salvation – *glorification*. This is when we are set free from the very presence of sin. This hope is meant to pull us through the sufferings of this life. This hope is meant to strengthen our commitment to trust and obey in the process of sanctification.

Randy Alcorn writes:

We do not desire to eat gravel. Why? Because God did not design us to eat gravel. Trying to develop an appetite for a disembodied existence in a non-physical Heaven is like trying to develop an appetite for gravel. No matter how sincere we are, and no matter how hard we try, it's not going to work. Nor should it.

What God made us to desire, and therefore what we do desire if we admit it, is exactly what he promises to those who follow Jesus Christ: a resurrected life in a resurrected body, with the resurrected Christ on a resurrected Earth. Our desires correspond precisely to God's plans. It's not that we want something, so we engage in wishful thinking that what we want exists. It's the opposite – the reason

we want it is precisely because God has planned for it to exist. As we'll see, resurrected people living in a resurrected universe isn't our idea – its God's.³

APPLICATION

The strength of a hope is directly related to understanding that hope.

The Apostle Paul thought long and hard about what the Scriptures reveal about the afterlife. Verse 18, *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us*, is his conclusion. His hope was strong because his understanding was deep.

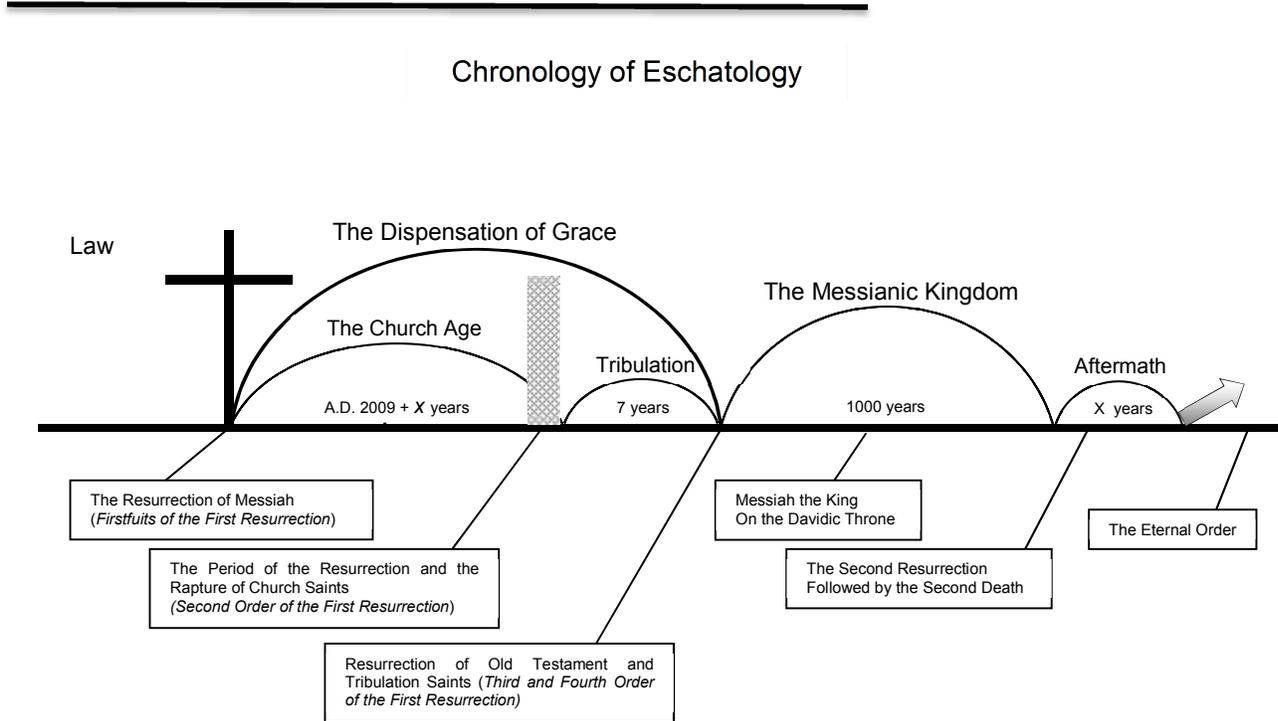
Is your hope strong? Are you looking forward to your future? Can you picture your resurrection body? Can you picture what this world might look like when its set free from the curse and renewed?

A strong hope is built on deep understanding. To that end I recommend three books to strengthen your hope.

Heaven by Randy Alcorn.

Imagine Heaven by John Burke.

Footsteps of the Messiah by Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum.



Adapted from *The Footsteps of the Messiah*, Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum, Ariel Ministries.

³ Ibid. pp. 7-8.