



Romans 8:18-27
A Spirit-Filled Summer
The Help of The Spirit

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Today continues our series that we're calling "A Spirit-Filled Summer" as we look at the Holy Spirit – what the role of the Spirit is, some of the things that the Spirit does, and what it means for us to live with by the Spirit. You may recall that in the last two Sundays when I preached, we were in Romans 8. And Romans 8 is all about the Holy Spirit. Well today is the third and final message that will come out of Romans 8. It's like a trilogy on the Spirit set within the larger plan of the whole series. You can think of these three sermons from Romans 8 as kind of being like the three "Captain America" movies or three "Iron Man" movies that are set within the larger context of all the Marvel Avengers movies.

And while I originally wanted to really keep today's message focused on a couple particular verses here towards the end of the passage about the Holy Spirit and prayer, I found myself in preparing this message unable to completely gloss over some other important facets of this passage, and then I also realized that the main point of the role of the Spirit here was less about prayer and more about the help that the Spirit gives us. So today's message is titled "The Help of the Spirit." You may recall from a couple weeks ago that in the verses just before this passage, Paul writes of sharing in Christ's suffering as well as his glory. Well, that theme continues today, as well. So let's dive into **Romans 8:18-27**.

First, Paul writes that our present sufferings are nothing compared to the glory that will be revealed in us. **What he means is: the glory of God that we will experience both now and in eternity far exceeds whatever challenges, difficulties, and sufferings we face here in this life.** Clearly, the resurrection of Jesus would be exhibit 1 for an illustration of what Paul means. The suffering Christ experienced on the cross was excruciating, but the glory of His resurrection surpasses it. But the glory of God exceeded the sufferings of people here on earth as he ministered to them as well. This is also what we experience when we come to believe in Jesus and trust Him as Lord and Savior – and that gives us hope not only for eternity but here in the midst of our present day sufferings as well.

Then in the next few verses Paul takes this idea and expands it to all of creation. **Creation is subject to “frustration” – in other words, all of creation is bent and broken, is impacted by sin.** This is not of its own doing, but because of the sin that we humans have brought into the world. All creation is “groaning” because of this. These verses are a reminder that God gave us dominion over the earth, to be stewards of creation; to care for it. It goes right back to the creation account in Genesis 1 and 2. We have a Biblical mandate to take good care of this world, and as we continue to explore beyond this world, our care of the rest of creation is included, too.

Some Christians, especially in the evangelical branch of Christianity, might say at this point, “Pastor: just stick to the gospel. Save souls and make disciples of Jesus.” Here’s the thing, however: **If we want to save souls and make disciples, then we have to bring help and hope into the midst of the sufferings of the world.** Win people over by how you live your faith. Be with them much as Jesus – Emanuel, “God with us” – joins with us in our sufferings and you will win people for Jesus. So, for example, people who suffer because of our poor earth stewardship are clearly people we can suffer with.

We Christians ought to be at the forefront of this, because we of all people understand that God commands us to take care of this world. There are other things, too: Race relations, poverty, homelessness, sex trafficking, and many other sufferings in this world are things that we Christians, of all people, ought to be right there in the trenches with people. All people are created in God’s image and deserve dignity and respect and love. God called the earth, and all of creation “good” (and humanity “very good”) and gives it to us to care for.

Unfortunately, many Christians will say that these things are “political,” and that our faith isn’t about politics. I would agree that politics should not be the aim of the Christian message. **But if we think caring for the earth and suffering with broken and hurting people are political issues, then we have given in to the world’s framing of the issues.** (Repeat.) These are *Biblical* and *theological* concerns much more than they are political ones;

and Jesus-followers should recognize them as such, and get involved in those things *because of our theology*.

So: For those Christians (especially evangelical-leaning ones) who want souls saved and disciples made, we've got to realize that these other things are directly connected to our mission of sharing Jesus with other people. How we relate to environmental issues and other issues too, impacts our ability to minister to others and share the gospel of Jesus Christ. To be clear, I'm not saying we advocate for things that go against our Christian beliefs. But too often, we don't help – or are even actively *unhelpful* – in things that *do* line up with our Christian beliefs and it damages our ability to share the gospel with people. We end up working against our own mission when we fail to see the connection between helping people in their sufferings and helping them to know Jesus as Lord and Savior.

We can look at the current pandemic for a great illustration. Let's say you're the CEO of a major company like Boeing – we could pick any of a number of businesses right now, but let's go with this one. Boeing, as you know, is in the business of building airplanes. They might have a more philosophical sounding mission statement, but building and selling airplanes is primarily how they pay the bills.

Let's say someone in the company told you, the CEO, a few years ago, "Hey, if we want to be able to sell more airplanes, we need to invest in people and companies and research institutions who are in the business of stopping pandemics, and equipping people to stay healthy in the midst of a pandemic." If you were the CEO and someone told that to you a few years ago, you'd probably say they're crazy. "That's not our business! We build airplanes. Pandemics are political – who wants to wear a face mask?...vaccinations are political...there's the whole 'anti-vax' crowd...so let's not invest in that. And what does any of it have to do with building airplanes, anyway? That would be a distraction to our goal of selling airplanes" You can easily imagine that kind of response not that long ago.

Right now, Boeing would happily go back in time and invest millions of dollars into organizations that do vaccine research and pandemic prevention

as well as pandemic response training and health safety training for their employees as well as for the general public who fly on their planes because this pandemic is killing their business. They've had tons of plane orders cancelled and had others deferred. The month of May of this year saw a *91% drop* in airline passengers compared to May a year earlier¹. I have a friend who is a pilot for Alaska Airlines who went almost exactly two months without flying a single plane. Now, we all know that Boeing has other challenges that preceded the pandemic...so things are compounded for them...but they, and so many other companies, would happily go back in time if they could and do things differently to mitigate the losses they're currently experiencing due to Covid-19. There's clearly a connection between the virus and their ability to live out their mission even though they seem completely unrelated on the surface.

Too often, we Christians – especially of the evangelical stripe – are much the same. “Earth care? Global warming? Water run-off concerns? Rising oceans? What does that have to do with telling people about Jesus?” Too often, that's our attitude. Meanwhile the losses in our churches – while not to the tune of 91% in one year – the losses have been mounting for decades and decades. My friends in Jesus: When people talk about the church being irrelevant, this is really at the heart of it. So, to use the topic in the passage today: **Too frequently, we don't see the connection between caring for the earth and saving a soul.** It can be easily expanded to say that too frequently, we don't see a connection between advocating for marginalized people and caring for their soul. And we wonder why the Good News of Jesus falls on deaf ears and the impact of the Christian faith on the world is decreasing?

I know that the heart of this church is to see people come to Jesus and be built as disciples of Jesus. And I'm asking us to consider: **What if Christians took seriously the call to good stewardship of our natural resources precisely because it's Biblical and is a theological issue and would help our witness to Jesus' saving grace?** What if we treated all human beings as the image bearers of God that they are – again, because it's a Biblical and theological issue? What if we evangelical Christians were known for taking up causes like this rather than being known as roadblocks? Don't you think that would help our cause of pointing people to Jesus if the world's

perceptions of us were different? Wouldn't that actually shine the light of Christ in the world? I think the answer is unequivocally, "Yes!"

It's a way to show people that Jesus loves them. It brings hope to people in the "here and now," which people need in order to have any hope for eternity. Paul writes of hope in the middle of this passage. And the fact is, we need hope. **People need hope in real and tangible ways "here and now," in order to have hope for the long term – especially for eternity.** For most Christians, that's backwards. We have hope now *because* of our hope for eternity through Jesus. But that doesn't resonate with most non-believers. In fact, you may have become a believer because someone gave you hope "here and now" which caused you to find hope for eternity. As you've grown in faith, the hope for eternity has probably become the driver of hope for today...but it may not have started that way. And, it's not how Jesus operated. He always brought hope to people "here and now" first, before any conversation about hope for eternity. People need that hope "here and now."

Let me give you an example. Fall of 2008 was the worst football season ever in the history of the University of Washington's football team: they went 0-11. It was an abysmal season. And if you had come along and said to me, "Don't worry, I've seen the future, and there's hope for you Huskies, because in 2016, just 8 years from now, they will be one of the four best teams in the country and play in the college football playoffs." If you'd said that to me (or any Husky fan) to give hope in the moment of 2008, I would have replied, "Eight years from now? That's forever! And how can that possibly happen given this season? Give me some hope here and now for that future you're telling me about. Help me believe that this thing you speak of might actually be true, by giving us a victory now."

I think it's much the same when it comes to the glory that we will one day experience and our desire for others to know Jesus and experience that glory as well: **The future hope that we have in eternity is awesome and amazing...that glory will exceed all of our present sufferings...but an awful lot of people need hope and help "here and now" in order to believe in that eternal hope.** Where is God's glory being revealed in us right now? For an awful lot of people, it's just too hard to believe that there's an

eternal heavenly home when this present world doesn't feel like home, and when we don't treat it well as we ought to treat our home. We hope for what we don't yet see and don't yet have as Paul writes in verse 24...but hope for eternity is just completely beyond someone who doesn't yet know Jesus and needs hope right now in the midst of their own health concerns, or their concern about global warming, or whatever other crisis they are currently suffering through. They need to know that God is with them and that God's people care about them and suffer with them in the things that they suffer through.

And maybe in those situations we don't even know what to say or do.

Honestly, I think that is often the case: we just don't know how to respond. And that's ok – it's Biblical. Paul writes in verse 26 that sometimes we don't know what to say/pray. Maybe we're uncertain about a next step – how do we live out our faith in regards to earth stewardship or helping the outcast person? Well, Paul also writes that in our weakness – like when we don't know what to say or do or even what to pray...when we feel helpless – in those moments, the Spirit helps us. Imagine that! God is with us through his Spirit! The Spirit even intercedes with “wordless groans.” Interestingly, the word for “groans” here is the same root word that Paul used earlier when he wrote that “all creation groans” because of the effects of sin on the world, and that he used in verse 23 when he writes that we believers “groan” as well as we long to be fully connected to our Heavenly Father. There's a connection between the Spirit, us, and all of creation that Paul is highlighting for us.

But: The point here in these last couple verses is that the Spirit helps us.

The Spirit will not lead us astray, because that would not be helpful. The Spirit will always lead us into the will of God.

A cell phone rang in an upscale gym locker room in NYC and the man next to it put it on loud speaker so he could keep working out while talking ... everyone else in the room slowly stopped and listened as the conversation carried on: Man: “Hello?” Woman: “Hi honey, it's me. Are you at the club?” Man: “Yes.” Woman: “I'm out shopping and found a beautiful leather coat. It's only \$2,000 – is it OK if I buy it?” Man: “Sure, go ahead if you like it

that much.” Woman: “Oh I do, it’s beautiful! I also stopped by that new Lexus dealership and saw one of the new models I really like – it’s on an opening special.” Man: “How much?” Woman: “\$90,000.” Man: “Wow! OK, but for that price I want it with all the options.” Woman: “Great! Oh, and one more thing ... I was just talking to Jamie and found out that the house we wanted to buy last year is back on the market ... they’re asking \$980,000 for it. Remember it was well over a million when we looked at it?” Man: “I don’t know....Make an offer for \$900,000 and they’ll probably take it. If not, we can go the extra \$80,000 if that’s what you really want.” Woman: “OK. I’ll see you later! I love you so much!” Man: “I love you to.”

The man then hung up the phone. The other people in the locker room were staring at him in astonishment, mouths wide open at the conversation they’d just heard. The man looked around and said: “Anyone know whose phone this is?”

The Spirit will never lead us astray like that, because that is not helpful. That man was not helpful to that woman...nor to the man who *actually* was her husband; That’s going to be an interesting conversation later that day, for sure. Bu: **The Spirit is here to help us. Help us in what? In what Paul wrote before: helping us make it through our sufferings and helping us to help others in the midst of *their* sufferings so that the glory of God might be revealed in us to them.** So that all of creation will be liberated from its bondage to decay. So that people will have help and hope – for today, tomorrow, and eternity – because of the good news of Jesus Christ.

So let the Spirit help you. Even when you aren’t sure of how to proceed, let the groans of the Spirit join in with your own groans for your heavenly Father...and let those join together with the groans of creation so that we might be with people in their sufferings...so they would know that God and God’s people are with them to help them. That’s how hope will be born in their lives, much as it is for you. That is how people will find hope for today in their sufferings, and ultimately will find hope for eternity as well. And that’s the mission. That’s our desire. To help people know Jesus. So let’s help them in their sufferings, just as the Spirit helps us, trusting that in the midst of that process, God’s glory will be revealed for the world to see. Let’s

pray...Amen.

ⁱ https://www.seattletimes.com/business/boeing-aerospace/largest-boeing-777x-customer-emirates-likely-to-push-out-deliveries-into-2022/?utm_source