

Romans 8:19-23  
"Environmental Evangelism"

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1. On April 20, 2010, there was a deadly explosion on the Deepwater Horizon oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico. Since that catastrophic event, millions of gallons of oil have flumed out into the ocean every, single day.

2. Even the most environmentally calloused person must realize the devastation both ecologically and economically that this preventable disaster has caused.

3. At the 2010 Southern Baptist Convention, a resolution was passed regarding the oil spill that concludes with this statement:

"Resolved, that we acknowledge that this tragedy should remind us to testify to the love of God in His creation and to the hope, through the blood of Christ, of a fully restored creation in which the reign of God is seen 'on earth as it is in heaven' (Matthew 6:10)."

4. In Romans 1:20, Paul indicates that the creation itself testifies to men about the power and glory of God. The heavens and the earth point to the majesty and might of Jesus Christ, their Creator.

5. As Christians, when we see what is going on in the gulf of Mexico, our hearts should break, if for no other reason, because of the fact that the glory of God's creation has been marred by the greed and negligence of sinful men.

6. In Romans chapter 8, we find a section of verses in which Paul talks about the creation; or as the King James translates it, "*the creature*". By "creation", Paul is referring to the environmental world around us.

7. The great preacher, Martyn Lloyd-Jones helps us to understand the idea behind "the creation". He says, "It means the animals; it means vegetation, flowers, grass; it means the rivers and the streams, the mountains and the hills; it means the earth itself..."<sup>i</sup>

8. In this passage, Paul points us to the gospel message that can be found in the created world around us. There is preaching in our planet. There is evangelism in our environment.

9. Look with me at this interesting passage, and consider the gospel truth we see in the creation around us, and the impact it can have upon our lives. First of all, notice that:

### **I. THE CREATION WAS IMPACTED BY SIN**

1. Though rejected by much of the modern world, the first 3 chapters of Genesis are critical to right understanding of the world in which we live.

2. In those chapters God reveals Himself as the creator of time and space, the universe, and everything that exists within it.

3. In those chapters we are also told of the creation of man, and of the sin that brought about the fall of the human race.

4. We often think of the damage from the fall, and the curse of sin, only in terms of the effects it had upon humanity.

5. However, in Genesis 3, as well as in Romans 8, the Bible reveals that the fall of man had an impact upon everything that God had created, not just man.

6. Look at our text, and consider with me a couple of things regarding the impact that man's sin had upon the whole of creation. Consider first of all:

#### **A. The origin of the curse**

1. In Romans 8, and verse 20, Paul says, "*For the [creation] was made subject to vanity...*" The word "vanity" speaks of something that does not fulfill its purpose.

2. In other words, there was a point in which the whole creation became something less than it was originally intended to be.

3. Verse 20 says that this was not something the creation did "willingly", but rather something it was made to do. In fact, a curse was placed upon the creation.

4. In Genesis 3:17-18, we find the origin of this curse. It says, "*And unto Adam [the Lord] said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field...*"

5. When man sinned, the shockwaves from that sin not only affected the human race, but also the earth on which the human race would live.
6. Though the ground was not at fault for Adam's sin, it nonetheless suffered in the fallout of that sin.
7. There is a reminder here that we never sin in isolation. There is really no such thing as private sin. Your sin will affect much more than just yourself.
8. Consider with me not only the origin of this sinful curse that has impacted the creation, but think also about:

### **B. The outcome of the curse**

1. Looking back at Romans 8, in verse 21, Paul says there is going to be a day when the creation "*...shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption...*"
2. The implication is that right now, the planet on which we live, the natural world around us, *is* in the bondage of corruption.
3. In other words, the creation is a slave to death. It is filled with death, and it is dying itself.
4. Just as the man's sin brought death upon his children after him, death also passed into the creation around him.
5. Look at verse 22. Paul says, "*For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.*"
6. The language of that verse paints the picture of a woman in labor. The closer she gets to the delivery, the greater the pains, and the clearer the signs of what is about to happen.
7. Think about what we have seen in just the last decade or so. We have experienced a number of destructive hurricanes like Katrina and Ike, and have witnessed tsunamis that wipe out entire regions.
8. We have seen an increase in devastating earthquakes, like the one in Haiti that claimed over 200,000 lives.
9. Along with these disasters, it is clear that natural resources like fresh water and oil are increasingly being stretched and depleted with the growing population.

10. The reality is that earth isn't getting any younger. The evidence of the curse of corruption is clear. Our planet is not evolving, as some would suggest.

11. No, the creation started in perfection, and has been going the other way ever since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden. The damage of sin has extended to the creation.

12. Notice a second truth we draw from this interesting passage. We see here not only that *the creation was impacted by sin*, but we see also that:

## II. THE CREATION IS INCLUDED IN SALVATION

1. Look again at our text in Romans 8. In verse 19, Paul says, *"For the earnest expectation of the [creation] waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God."*

2. In other words, the creation is anxiously waiting for the day when the people of God will be united with Christ and revealed for who they really are.

3. Why is the creation so interested in this event? Look again at verse 21. It says, *"Because the [creation] itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God."*

4. In other words, the day that we are finally and fully delivered from the curse of sin will also be the day in which the creation will be delivered from its curse as well.

5. This is an important truth, and one that is worth examining in Scripture. Think about the inclusion of creation in the work of salvation, and notice with me:

### A. What is promised in eternity

1. If you turn over to the last book of the Bible, the book of the Revelation, you can get a sneak peek at what is to come for both us, and the creation around us.

2. In Revelation 21:1, John writes and says, *"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea."*

3. Just as we are going to receive a brand-new, glorified body, so also is the creation going to be re-created.

4. Revelation 22:3 says, *"And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him:"*

5. Just as we have a promise of an eternity yet to come that will outshine and outweigh the life we now live, so also, God has promised a glorious eternity for creation itself.

6. Salvation is not ultimately about rescuing souls out of an evil planet to a cloudy, dreamy place where we play harps and float around with angel wings.

7. No, the ultimate end of salvation is the restoration of *all* that sin has corrupted and destroyed. Salvation is about, if I may borrow John Milton's titles, *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*.

8. In I Corinthians 15:25, speaking of Jesus, Paul says, "For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet." In other words, Jesus came to conquer every effort against and enemy of God.

9. The restoration of the creation to the glory it had before the curse of sin is a promise that will be fulfilled in eternity.

10. With that being said, notice with me not only what is promised in eternity, but think also about:

### **B. What was purchased at Calvary**

1. Again, in Romans 8:19, we are told that the whole creation is anticipating the day when the sons of God will be fully revealed and glorified by their Father.

2. On that day, Paul says in verse 21, the creation will be freed from its bondage to the sinful curse it received way back in the Garden of Eden.

3. Now, think with me about this. If the regeneration of the universe is tied to the regeneration of man, then it must also be connected to the cause or source of man's regeneration.

4. In other words, the cross of Jesus Christ is not just the place where man's sins are paid for, and his salvation is accomplished, but it must also be the place where the rescue of the whole creation was accomplished.

5. The cross really is the hinge of history. The cross really is the most significant event to have ever occurred on this planet.

6. No wonder the earth quaked and the rocks rent when Jesus cried, "It is finished!" No wonder the sun hid its face in darkness as the Maker died for the sake of all that He made.

7. In 1719, in his most famous hymn, *Joy to the world*, Isaac Watts wrote:

"No more let sins and sorrows grow,  
Nor thorns infest the ground;  
He comes to make His blessings flow,  
Far as the curse is found"

8. It is impossible to overstate the power of the cross of Jesus Christ, for not only were the souls of men redeemed by His death, but the creation itself owes its ultimate salvation to the Lamb of God.

9. There is a third truth we can draw from this passage that points us to the evangelism present in our environment. Notice not only that *the creation was impacted by sin*, and *the creation was included in salvation*, but notice also that:

### III. THE CREATION CAN INSPIRE A SAINT

1. The reason Paul inserts this passage about the creation here in Romans 8, is because he is trying to encourage the believers about the glory that is to come.

2. Look at verse 18. Paul says, *"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."*

3. To illustrate this truth, that the grief of the present is no match for the glory of eternity, Paul points us to the present condition of the creation in light of what is coming for it, because of Jesus Christ.

4. In other words, Paul uses the gospel preached in the creation to inspire us in our relationship with Christ, and the hope we have in Him.

5. Let me show you what I mean. The creation can inspire a saint in a couple of ways. For one thing, the creation inspires us:

#### A. To anticipate what is promised

1. Look again at verse 19. Paul says, *"For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God."*

2. That phrase "earnest expectation" is very interesting. It describes someone with the head lifted up, and their neck stretched out, looking intently for something.

3. Paul describes the created world, and paints a picture of it craning its neck, looking anxiously for the coming of Christ and the glory that will follow.

4. The environment around us is eagerly and anxiously looking for the coming of Christ. Shouldn't we be as well?

5. Titus 2:13 puts it this way: *"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."*

6. II Peter 3:13 says, *"Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."*

7. The late Pastor Adrian Rogers once said, "What's this world coming to? Its coming to Jesus!"<sup>ii</sup> More specifically, Jesus is coming to this world.

8. In light of the promised and eminent return of Christ, we should, like the creation around us, be eagerly looking for His return!

9. The creation around us can inspire us not only to anticipate what is promised, but also:

### **B. To accept what is present**

1. Look again at verse 20. Paul says that the creation, *"...was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope."*

2. Again, the creation did not willingly fall under the curse of sin, but rather was subjected to it by God after the fall of man in the Garden of Eden.

3. Right now, the whole creation has accepted the curse that God has subjected it to, and waits hopefully and patiently until it is lifted.

4. There is a powerful lesson here for us. In verse 18, Paul mentions the "sufferings of this present time". Like the creation itself, there are times when God subjects us to certain sufferings in this life.

5. How do you respond to those times of suffering in your life? Do you accept what God has briefly placed upon you, and like the creation, look forward even more to the coming of Christ?

6. Or, do you murmur and complain, question and doubt the love and providence of God? The creation groans under the curse, but it still glorifies God through its existence.

7. Are you still able to glorify God in the midst of your sufferings? Do you still praise Him, even though He has subjected you to pain?

8. Sitting in a dirty, 1<sup>st</sup> century, Roman jail cell, Paul could say, *"...I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need (Philippians 4:11-12)."*

9. Are you willing to accept present suffering in light of eternal glory? Are you willing, like the creation, to be subjected to that which is painful in order that the purpose of God may be fulfilled in your life?

10. If someone were to come to me tomorrow and say, "Mr. Trivette, I am willing to completely pay off your mortgage, and any other debt you may have. However, before I will pay off your debts, you are going to have sleep outside, on the ground, for one week."

11. Not only would I agree to that deal, but Angel would probably have my bag packed before I could say yes.

12. Paul says that the sufferings of this present life, "*...are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*"

13. In other words, we can accept the present because we anticipate the promise. That is the inspiration we draw from the creation around us.

1. I've been reading through the Psalms in my personal devotions, and I came across Psalm 96 this week.

2. The last three verses of that Psalm says, "*Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof. Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice. Before the LORD: for he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth.*"

3. The creation groans in pain right now. However, the day is coming with the creation will rejoice when its Creator once again sets foot upon it.

4. Much like you and me, the creation is fallen in Adam, but it will be raised up in Christ. He will make all things new!

5. While we grieve over the damage to God's creation that has occurred in the Gulf of Mexico, we also rejoice in knowing the truth of environmental evangelism.

6. Once again we are reminded of how the gospel of Jesus Christ touches everything. May we never forget all that the cross means to us now and forever.

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<sup>i</sup> Lloyd-Jones, D. Martyn, Romans: The Final Perseverance of the Saints; 8:17-39, (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1975), p. 49

<sup>ii</sup> Rogers, Adrian, Adrianisms: Volume Two, (Love Worth Finding Ministries, Memphis, TN, 2007), p. 153