

## The Heart of Romans: “All Creation Groans” Weekly Recap

*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to **frustration**, not by its own choice, but by the will of **the one who subjected it**, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.*  
-Romans 8:18-22

In this passage, Paul is making clear that there is a deep connection between people and the rest of Creation. Rome, like other empires, exploited this connection in their propaganda. They produced coins with wheat or grain on the face, to show that they were the source of the blessing of the land. Egypt had done the same during the time of the Israelites' slavery there. This was a false narrative. Behind the propaganda was raw power ready to destroy anyone who opposed them. The Roman cross was the symbol of this in the first century. Paul says that “all creation groans” from the weight of human sin. To illustrate this idea, Jared used a scene from *The Lion King* in which the land was desolate and without color because of the unjust rule of Scar and the Hyenas. The imagery mirrors that of Genesis, where from the beginning, people were given the role of both ruling and working the land. Look at the following passages:

*God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; **fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over** the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”* - Genesis 1:28

*The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden **to work it and take care of it.*** - Genesis 2:15

Notice that the job of people was to work the land before the curse of sin ever happened. Work itself is a blessing of God. Our role as stewards and rulers in Creation is foundational to who we are created to be from the beginning. Sin changed how that relationship functioned. Look at what happened:

*To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’ “Cursed is the ground **because of you**; through **painful toil** you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the **sweat of your brow** you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”* - Genesis 3:17b-19

Romans 8:20 says that “creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it...” This language is ambiguous in the Greek, and has been the source of significant debate. When combined with Genesis 3:17-19, this passage gives us a couple of possibilities to consider:

1. God cursed the Creation after cursing man, as a **logical consequence** of sin. This would be a *prescriptive* curse. (Jared explained this in a humorous, yet painful story about a broken leg. You should watch it if you missed it!)
2. God says that “because of man, the Creation is cursed” as a **natural consequence** of his mismanagement and exploitation. This would be a *descriptive* curse.

There are likely elements of both interpretations in the reality we see everyday. Regardless of our interpretation, scripture is clear about two things:

1. We are still given a vocation of caring for and working the land, and the law included provisions in Leviticus for the proper way to do it.
2. When we exploit or misuse Creation, we encounter both the judgment of God and the natural consequences of that sin.

A great example of this was in the Babylonian Exile (this is where we are in our Isaiah study). God said that because of the sin of Judah, the people would be displaced, and the land would be given seventy years of “sabbath” to recover from their presence (see II Chronicles 36:21).

Jared then talked about the experience he had playing football on land at Boles Children’s Home that had been packed so hard from overuse that only goat heads would grow on it. Another area at the home, the field inside of the huge circle drive that accessed all the homes there, is an example of how land can be restored and maintained to the benefit of the kids. Once they started using smaller ZTR mowers to care for it, the grass improved, and the field was fit for the kids to play on. Over many years, it has become a beautiful area with a pavilion and sport courts. Jared then spoke about a house parent who asked that the land around his home be left to him to care for. He planted lush grass and a couple of trees, kept it meticulously with a push mower and rake, and watered it regularly. Jared described an oasis of Creation in the middle of the property there. This served as a witness to this house parent even after his death.

It is important to note that Paul does not leave the Creation without hope. In fact, he says that all Creation is on its tiptoes in anticipation of the children of God being revealed. **The coming glory that Creation awaits is in us.** Through the cross, we are given future **salvation**, but we are given a present **vocation**. NT Wright asserts in his book, *The Heart of Romans*, that “God puts humans right so they can be part of putting the world right.”

Finally, Jared spoke of a field further out on the property that had previously been subject to overuse by cotton farming. Only honey locusts and mesquite trees could grow there—the “thorns and thistles” of the tree world. On one occasion, he fashioned a crown of thorns from the green branches of one of the locust trees. While doing so, he realized that the soldiers that made the crown for Jesus literally hurt themselves in order to subject him to their mockery and sin. We are the same. Sin against God hurts so many; but it most certainly hurts ourselves deeply. Thanks be to God through Christ, our hope of glory. Next week, we will look at how we as individuals share in the groaning of Creation, and share its assurance in the restoration of all things.