

28th June 2020 6pm – The message of Romans 8

Talk by Andrew Attwood

Well, good evening. It's good to see you here. This is Andrew from St. John's speaking tonight. It's extended Bible teachings evening. We're going to be looking at a passage from Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 8, probably one of the most significant passages in the Bible. Before we dive into it though, it would be good to get ourselves in the right frame of mind. So before we start, make sure you've got a Bible to hand. That would be useful for your engagement with this, but let's see if we can just have a moment of quiet and we'll pray.

Lord Jesus, we thank You for the Bible. We thank You for this gift, this deposit of truth that helps us understand God, understand ourselves, understand You, understand Your plan and Your purposes. We thank You for it.

But we acknowledge, Lord Jesus, that it is not easy, and particularly as we wrestle with one of the most famous passages in the New Testament, we pray for Your help. Would You give us grace, Lord Jesus, to read and understand a bit more, what Paul Your apostle was saying? Would You help us to enter into the big themes that he was wanting us, wanting future readers to understand? So that we might be transformed into Your likeness, helping to bring more of Your kingdom and bringing glory to God?

In Jesus' Name,
Amen.

Okay, so if we were to start with Romans 8, we would probably be starting in the wrong place. I know that traditionally, most Bible studies just open a book and look there and you work your way through it. With something as significant as Romans 8, you can't really do that. My guess is, if you were to hold between your fingers the pages that make up Romans as a letter, it's just a few pages thick, hardly anything at all. Yet the letter to the Romans has literally, quite literally, changed the world from the early emergence of the Church, which basically overturned an empire and affected every single country within that empire, all the way through to the Reformation. This letter has been fundamental in the foundation and the challenges that have been raging around all of those changes. When Paul wrote this letter, goodness knows what he imagined it would do! We do know that he was writing into a particular context and I'll explain that in a moment. But this letter is like dynamite. This letter is a world-changing message. We do praise God for the four gospels. We also praise God for the other letters. But Romans has a particular status in helping us understand some things that these other books don't necessarily reveal. Romans is a really significant piece of writing. And Romans 8 is regarded as a crescendo, a high point, within the letter.

So before we dive in, let me set the scene a little. Paul, when he was writing all of his letters, was writing out of a particular background. He comes from a phase in history that we would call 'Second Temple Judaism'. The first temple was destroyed, so they built another temple. And between that point and the invasion of Rome, you have an understanding of how the Jews used to function, with their certain senses of expectation of how God was going to right all the wrongs and fulfil all of His promises. In particular, one of the things that you will find threaded through the letter of Romans is the phrase 'the righteousness of God'. It's an important phrase in Romans all the way through, 'God's righteousness revealed'. It can be translated, 'the covenant faithfulness of God', because it reveals how God did what He promised all along. So it's not simply His moral goodness, but it's His faithfulness in delivering what He was promising from the beginning. And the letter, of course, is basically showing how this Jew, this person called Paul, previously called Saul, sees all of that

big Israel story and sees Jesus Christ as the fulfilment of all that God had originally promised.

The letter of Romans is traditionally seen in four parts, chapters 1 to 4, chapters 5 to 8, 9 to 11 and 12 to 16. There's a reasonable amount of consensus around the scholars that that's a good way of breaking it up into four. It's useful to just describe it not just as a set of separate parts, though, but more as kind of like parts [movements] within a symphony. If you imagine listening to a symphony, if you're in a concert hall, and a symphony is playing, you might hear a theme played in the first part, but it doesn't disappear when you get to the second part. It might be added in as an undertone, it might return in part three or movement four. So there's something symphonic about all of these parts that have interplay between them and they build to different kinds of crescendo, particularly with Romans 8, a significant high point in Paul's letter.

It is a local letter. It's not a general letter. The letter to the Ephesians could be described as a general letter. That was to a range of churches. But this is a local letter, written specifically to the Christians who were at Rome. They weren't a large group, by all accounts, they were probably, who knows, it could have been two parts of 20: 20 here, 20 there. It appears from what Paul gives clues about in his letter that there was a group of Gentile Christians over here and a group of Jewish Christians over here. And Paul was writing about that: he was writing about how they might relate. But it is important to say as well, though, that for reasons that are clear to Paul, he doesn't just write it as a local letter. He writes it as a kind of manifesto for the whole of the heart of the Christian faith, exemplifying and highlighting and celebrating the Gospel of Jesus Christ. So it's local, but it carries further than that. It's important to hear all of that because you can't understand Romans 8 without getting a bit of context. It means that we if we step back and see it from back here, you will then be able to zoom in and say, "Aha, that's what Paul meant when he was saying those interesting or sometimes complicated phrases," but I would want to emphasise, and I'll try and remember to come back to it as we go through this, a lot of Romans is revealing God's faithfulness to the covenant. That God said what He was going to do, and He delivered what He said He was going to do.

I'm going to start somewhere different though. I'm going to spend just five or six minutes scooting through a different part of the Bible to set the scene. There is a presumption, and I think there's a number of scholars who to agree with this now, that there are certain parts of the Old Testament that were formative for people like Paul from Second Temple Judaism. Isaiah appears to be a very key piece of text for the people of Jesus' day. And that would have included Paul, as a Pharisee, where there is a narrative described in the Old Testament within which the people of God thought they were still living. In other words, it was a live story. And so they had an expectation of things yet to happen. So let me just scoot through with you some particular highlights that you would get. If you ever were looking at some interesting study to do, it would be worth setting aside some time and looking at Isaiah chapter 40 all the way through to 55 because those give some significant clues as to why Christians like Paul really believed Jesus fulfilled everything that He promised, that God had promised He would do with Israel. Right from the early part of this section of Isaiah, God says things that are really intriguing to the Christian ear.

Chapter 40, "Comfort, comfort my people have sent has been paid for." And then He goes on to say, "And by the way, the Word of God will stand forever everything else fades everything else goes, but my word will be held true."

Chapter 41, "I have chosen Israel, I have not rejected you." One of the deep concerns that Israelites held for many, many centuries probably was, "You called us to be a light in this world. Why does it keep going wrong? Have You rejected

us? Are we now not in Your plan?" and God in Isaiah was saying, "You are definitely part of my plan."

But then it moves into chapter 42 in Isaiah, where God starts talking about 'My Servant', a particular servant which is sort of a personification of His, but it might be somebody else, a servant who is going to be faithful. And through His faithfulness, He says that He will bring forth justice to the nations.

Again, by the time you get to chapter 43 in Isaiah, God is saying, "Fear not, I will redeem you, I will buy you back." These are all resonant themes that we as Christians would understand. And in 43, He even says, I will make a way in the desert, streams in the wasteland. It's almost like God is saying, "You know when you were going through the wilderness, you know when you've been in exile, I will make this right. And I will make it right with you and through you."

Chapter 49 of Isaiah emphasises, again, "It is too small a thing for you just to be a light to each other. I will make you a light to the Gentiles," quite explicitly now. Through Isaiah God is saying, "even though Israel has failed multiple times, through you, light is going to shine on the whole world. God has not forgotten you, Israel."

Indeed, the story starts to get a bit darker by the time you get to chapter 51. When God says, "Rise up Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of His wrath." It was a recognition in the people of Israel around Paul's time, that the people of Israel were often under the cosh, under God's wrath, because of failure, because of sin. And they had drunk down to the dregs the cup that God had given them, and that felt like that was going to somebody, something that will unlock the future.

And then you get these sweet tones in chapter 52 of Isaiah, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news, your God reigns." A promise to the people of Israel was that God would actually come to earth and He would rule and He would reign over the whole earth. All sounds very splendid.

But by the time you get to Isaiah 53, the story seems unusual. It's like, well, "surely He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows." And you get this strange story of a Suffering Servant.

Isaiah 54 says this, "For a brief moment I abandoned you. But with deep compassion, I will bring you back," as though there's a moment when God will turn His back on true Israel, and then bring them back.

And then by the time you get to chapter 55, in Isaiah again, it says, "I will make an everlasting covenant with you. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, your ways and not My ways." And again, God insists, despite Israel's failures, "My word does not go out of my mouth and return to Me empty. What I say is going to happen." And then if you skip right to the end of Isaiah it says, "Behold, I'm going to create a new heavens and a new earth."

What's that got to do with Romans 8? Well, all of that is a kind of an overarching narrative that was the expectation of the people of Israel, that God would redeem the world through Israel, and that He would then establish a new covenant with them through Israel, and it would renew and change the whole world.

So that was their expectation, but they had no idea how it was going to happen. Time and time again in the Psalms, it's like, "How long? And how are You going to do it through people like us?" And so by the time you get to Paul, and Paul's encounter with Jesus Christ, on the road to Damascus, Paul sees the vision of Jesus Christ revealed to him. Previously Paul would have thought this is just someone who's trying to distract us from God. But when he sees Jesus, as the

light of the world revealed to him, a penny drops. This is the One through whom the whole story begins to make sense.

So, from Isaiah, to Paul, now to Romans.

Like I said, Romans 8 is a crescendo. It's a high part of an extremely densely written letter. Paul is trying to persuade all the way through this letter, Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians, that they are now newly-created as one unit in Jesus Christ. And so he spends the first few chapters explaining how all of us, every single section of society, every nation, every culture, every individual is in the same boat.

In chapter 1 of Romans, God's wrath is revealed against godlessness. Paul really hammers this home, explaining the dreadful brokenness of the human situation.

In chapter 2, how God's judgement of the world is entirely justifiable to both Gentile and to the Jews as well. So even though there is a spelling-out in this letter, that we are unrighteous, and that we aren't deserving of anything, there's this thread running through Romans, of God's righteousness, of God's faithfulness, God's covenant faithfulness. It's almost as though Paul is beginning to build a story by saying, "You know all those promises that God said that He would work it through, this is how He does it."

And then he does a detour in chapter 4, and starts talking about Abraham. He says¹, "Look how it was right back with Abraham. Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as personal righteousness. He was justified as being righteous because he trusted that God would do what God had said." Chapter 4 is really very formative, very important. And it raises now to the surface this question of justification. Justification has been a hotly debated issue in the last, say, 10-15 years. But in simple terms, justification can be described as how God incorporates into His family people who shouldn't necessarily be there in their own merit. He adopts in, He justifies and the story of Abraham is the perfect example of this, simply on the basis of faith.

You get that sweet, beautiful story emerging in chapter 5, where Paul described it as a running narrative:² "Just at the right time, God demonstrates His love for us. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." So the narrative begins to make sense. And it starts to sound very much like the Isaiah story, where you have this promise of God reigning, and God baring His holy arm and He's going to do it. And yet He's going to do it through Somebody who dies. And He's going to do it through Someone who is abandoned for a short time. Remember Jesus on the Cross – his cry of dereliction,³ "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?" And for a short time, God abandons Christ, because on Christ, the sins of the world are carried.

By the time you head into chapter 6 of Romans, the outcome of this is now beginning to be celebrated, that that which we were doing in our own strength is now dead, dead to sin. And suddenly there's the possibility of a newly-made, newly-raised people – not raised to do as we please. We are now born into a new situation, redeemed, like Isaiah says, redeemed to be slaves to righteousness instead of slaves to sin. So our redemption is not just to do as we please, our redemption is to live for the One who died for us.

Many people have debated the meaning behind behind chapter 7 in Paul's letter to the Romans. And I'm persuaded that it's kind of a snapshot describing the story of Israel again. It's capturing a sense of a people who would try hard to do good and fail and receive the law and know what is right but can't keep it. So what they know they want to do, they just cannot do. It's like a picture of a

1 Romans 4 verses 3, 9 and 10 – referring back to Genesis 15:6

2 Romans 5:6 and 5:8

3 Matthew 27:46

people who were called to be the light of the world, but can't achieve it in their own strength, despite having the oracles of God, despite having the law.

So we get to Romans 8.

Let me read to you the first sections of this amazing chapter. And we will work our way through it. And I have no idea how long this will take. I have to admit to you, I've bitten off more than I can chew here. Romans 8 is so complex and so sophisticated, I would much rather this Bible study whet your appetite to read it more yourselves. I'll do my best. Let's see how far I can get.

So the first few verses of Romans 8.

¹ Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

So this is probably a famous piece of text that has given comfort to millions of Christians down through the centuries, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Condemnation is what was justified before. The word of judgement over the human race is 'guilty'. You are condemned as sinful, as ungodly, as wicked, as idolatrous. And yet, because of what God has done, as a dramatic intervention, we are now in Him, which means that when God looks at Christ, and God looks at us, He sees Christ in us and us in Christ. And therefore the condemnation that was justified, pointed at us, rests instead on Christ on the cross.

What does this have to do with Israel fulfilling His call? The promises in Isaiah were that God would keep His word, that they would be the light to the world, and that God would make sure it really happened. Jesus is the ultimate fulfilment of Israel's call. Jesus isn't Plan B. Jesus is the fulfilment of God's promise that there would be image-bearing people in the world in the line of Abraham, like Jesus was, who would faithfully follow the law and would bear the consequences on behalf of others, to be a true light in the world. So Jesus the Israelite fulfils His plan and God's faithfulness is demonstrated.

It does say in these first few verses of chapter 8, that the law was powerless because of our sinful nature. So God did it instead through His own Son. And part of the plan had always been that God would give His word, give His guidance, give His principles to His people Israel, to help them live His way. The problem is that the law merely highlighted what was fundamentally wrong with Israel and with all humanity. As soon as you are presented with what is good and true, that which is in us because of our fallen nature rejects it, we reject it doubly. It's like seeing the sign on the wall that says, 'Wet paint. Do not touch.' As soon as it says 'do not touch,' what do you do? Do you want to touch it? That's how we're wired. And so the law, even though the law was good, was powerless to save us. And so God allowed that story to track out. There's an interesting phrase, even all the way back at the very end of Deuteronomy, I think it's Deuteronomy 30 [verse] 1, where Moses prophesied what's going to happen to the future people. And he says this, "There'll be all these blessings, there'll be all these cursings if you don't follow what God says." And he said, "When you have gone through all the blessings, and all the cursings and then your heart is turned back to God, then everything will come through." Even all the way back then, Moses knew they would have to go through both blessings and cursings, before the story was clear, that human beings can't do it on their own.

That passage that I just read through there from verse 3 and 4, though, is very important. It says this: "God sent Jesus to be a sin offering. And so He condemned sin in the flesh." There's sometimes a misunderstanding of what God did with Jesus on the cross. God wasn't some kind of angry deity who threw His innocent Son in front of the bus, and the Son just got hit. It's not like that. God the Father and God the Son both agreed together long before that they would both work out a sacrificial plan where they took it upon themselves to bear the consequences. God didn't condemn Jesus. It says, "He condemned sin in the flesh of Jesus." So Jesus was the representative human. Jesus adopts the new role of being the new representative Adam, and He says, "Instead of looking at the human race, look at Me, Father: I'll bear it." And so the consequences of breaking all of God's ways, and the injustices in the world, of the evil and wicked behaviour, landed on Christ, and the sin of the world was judged in His flesh. God wasn't angry at Jesus, Jesus was simply bearing it on our behalf, to fulfil the law, He willingly did it. And this is a demonstration of God's ultimate love. He takes it instead of us. It's remarkable.

Let me read on from verse 5. This is where he starts to describe what has happened in the light of all of this and it's just, it's remarkable stuff. It's quite dense language again, but just bear with the flow of it. Verses 5 to 10 in chapter 8: ⁴

⁵ Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

⁶ The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸ Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

⁹ You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness.

Let me just pause for a moment there. So verses 5 to 10 are talking about the different dimensions of who is who now, now that Christ has come, and Christ has died. The whole human race is in effect in captivity to its old nature, the sinful nature, the inclination to do the selfish thing. And Paul is contrasting that with what has dramatically happened because Christ now has put His Spirit in us. It isn't to do with pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps and trying to be good; something fundamental has now changed, because Christ has died for us, and He's given us instead His Spirit. He goes on to say that the Spirit is like this and the sinful nature is like this and the sinful nature cannot do what those who have the Spirit can do. There is nothing, there is nothing that the sinful nature can do to please God, even at our very best, outside of Christ. It doesn't please God, because it's got a twist in it, it's got a selfishness to it. But if you have the Spirit of Christ, it means you belong to Christ. If you don't have the Spirit of Christ, and you don't belong to Him yet, this is all to do with ownership. And it's all to do with wiring. Imagine a house that needs complete renovation. Imagine a house that has ancient electrics, ancient plumbing, it all has to be ripped out. All of the old ways, all of the old systems have to go, and new wiring and new plumbing and new systems have to be put in. And it is that dramatic, that when the Spirit comes into a person's life, they are renewed from the inside out, and now they no longer live for themselves.

⁴ Please note that Andrew actually read from the 1984 NIV UK edition. See note at the end of this document.

Let me read on from verse 11:

¹¹ And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

This is all about resurrection.

¹² Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation – but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

¹⁴ For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children⁵ of God. ¹⁵ The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ ¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. ¹⁷ Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

This is a strong emphasis on the idea of adoption. It's not a sexist thing to say that we are all sons of God [or talk about sonship], the language is intended to emphasise the fact, like the head of any household in the Roman world, it was the eldest one who is going to be the one who inherits, and the natural son is the one who enters into all that the parent has for them. When you are adopted into a family like that, you get everything that the natural child gets. When you're adopted in, you get contracts that sign you in that say you're just like a natural son. Paul is using this very same metaphor to describe how those who have the Spirit of God are adopted in fully, so that we end up as co-heirs with Christ. That which Christ has, we now have, and what did Jesus have? He had resurrection.

This is where Paul is starting to take hold of that Isaiah theme and push it now forward to the next part of the story. He's saying something internal has now changed. We are now wired differently on the inside. But not only that, what happened to Jesus is a foretaste of what is going to happen to us, and eventually, to the whole world. If God raised Christ from the dead, so we too will be raised. This is part of the deal. This is not a kind of a supplementary idea, and it also knocks on the head the kind of old false idea of, we kind of float off to heaven when we die in some kind of disembodied way. The driving narrative of the whole of the Bible has always been including a new heaven and new earth. That was prophesied by Isaiah. It's emphasised again in Peter's letters. It's emphasised again in Revelation. The idea of the future coming to proper fruition includes everything being renewed: the resurrection of Jesus Christ was not simply something spiritual, it was physical. His physical resurrection was a foretaste of everything that was going to happen to everything. We would be the firstfruits of that at our resurrection, and then later in this passage it shows how that begins to affect the whole of the created order.

So, verses 18 to 25. This is where we realise that things aren't going to be necessarily wonderful in the short term.

¹⁸ I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the

5 In NIVUK 1984 edition: “sons of God”

will of the one who subjected it, in hope²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

I'm going to stop there for a moment. Paul is acknowledging that in this present moment, in this present age, we haven't hit yet into the last wonderful part of the story, where everything is redeemed, where we get new bodies, where we have a new earth in which we can live forever. He's saying that's not how things are. But he says, in comparison to that, everything that we go through now is nothing. Every struggle, every ache every pain, every bit of persecution, every oppression is going to be absolutely tiny compared to the glory, and he ties it to this expectation for the created world, "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 glorious freedom of the children of God." You see, when the human race fell, right at the beginning of the dawn of time, with humans on the earth, our sinfulness affected the whole world. Things that go wrong in nature, things that go wrong in how things are balanced in the world, or unbalanced in the world, are directly related to us and our behaviour, as stewards, as the ones who are meant to rule well in this realm. And so there is a frustration in creation, there is a longing in creation. The language that Paul uses is like that of a woman in labour, a woman who is aching and paining for the life to come. And he says that creation is longing for the freedom and the liberty of the sons of God. There is something that creation would see in us as Christians, that it longs to have for itself.

Let me read on from verse 22.

²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³ Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.

Paul has an explicit hope, and his explicit hope is for complete physical transformation. Sometimes Christians have been hoodwinked into believing that everything we can expect is either for this life therapeutically and we've got nothing afterwards, or it doesn't matter what happens in the material world, because everything will be much better in some kind of floaty paradise later on. Neither of those are true. The present is important, and the future is material. And Paul says that the physical redemption of Jesus' own body, His resurrection from the dead bodily, is what we are to long for, for ourselves, the redemption of our bodies. Verse 24:

²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

²⁶ In the same way (this is back to the struggle), the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. ²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

So Paul has set this story up by saying, "God has broken in, and He has kept His promises, all the way through, from the Old Testament now into this new situation under Christ. But in the meantime, suffering is going to be a feature of life in the present." Now, why would Paul place such an emphasis on that? Because when he looks at the story of Jesus Christ, and the story of the Suffering Servant in places like Isaiah 53, he knows that the glorious trajectory of the kingdom of God includes pain. It includes darkness and it includes death and dying. Paul sees that that's what Jesus would have read as a

young man, growing up into His ministry as Messiah, He would have looked at Isaiah 53 and seen that the means by which you move towards future hope is through the valley of the shadow of death. So Paul is entirely used to the idea that we shouldn't be trying hard to escape or avoid all suffering in this present age, he says, that's part of the deal. That's how the story goes, it includes suffering and suffering will do something in us and through us, that eventually too points towards God's Good News for the ultimate future.

And so this is where we move now towards the latter end of Romans 8 starting at verse 28. He's trying to bolster people and saying, "You don't know how good this is, so let me describe to you how we are in this present moment." Verse 28:

²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

Let me pause there for a minute. These are all significant words, "God works for the good of all those who love Him," "For those who have been called", "Those whom God foreknew and predestined," "Those whom He called He also justified; those whom He justified He also glorified." This gives a very strong sense that God has a plan and is working it out, and He's intentionally seeking people to fulfil what He has, or the future; people He calls, and He knows them beforehand. People He destines to be responsive. And then this sense of adoption. How many people have felt out of kilter, not belonging to someone, not feeling at home? And yet when they become Christians, when they become Christians, they think, "This is my family! God is my Father!" But that's not the end. It's not simply adoption into something where you belong. It's the beginning of what the Bible called glorification. Glorification is the transformation now from fractured brokenness into something that is more and more Christ-like. But ultimately, ultimately, it's to do with being fitted for the new heaven and the new earth to be like Christ, to conform to the likeness of God's own Son, conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ. And that will become increasingly natural for those who have the Spirit within them. In this present age we still carry the residual effect of sinfulness in our bodies because our bodies are overwhelmed by decay. We can talk about the idea of the weight of the fallen world still being our experience, still being our fundamental problem. We all age. We all suffer, we all have problems with progressing through time, getting old and dying. So that's still part of our lives as Christians, but it's not what we made for. It's not what we're ultimately shaped for. God has glorification as part of the ultimate end to this story for us, with that in mind.

So we get the language of great confidence.

³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

So we know now that we are in a permanent, secure, well-established situation where the very One who died for us stands before His heavenly Father, with His wrists bared, saying, "Look at Me. Don't look at them. This is now the status of the human race for those who have put their trust in Me." Jesus stands, and gives the Father every reason to celebrate what is new and good in the human race. The ultimate fulfilment of this true Israelite, God's own Son, has adopted so many people in, so many people now who are guaranteed the same status, the same inheritance that the Son of God has, which means no-one can condemn, no-one can accuse, no-one can take anything away from us, just like the language of John's Gospel, no-one can snatch us out of the Father's hand, because we are completely secure, just like Jesus is. And so it goes on:

³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written:

'For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.'

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Paul was speaking from experience. Paul knew what suffering was. And he was saying, "Can it affect us? Will it deflect us? Is this going to separate us? Can trouble or hardship, nakedness or danger?" these are things that Paul knew first-hand. And he quotes from the Old Testament⁶, "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." He's got some irony in there. He's saying it's true, it's like we're kind of under the cosh, just like a sheep dying. And he's making reference back to the Lamb that was slain. He's saying what happened to Christ may well happen to us as the world's reaction, as Satan's reaction to God's Good News, but does it affect us, does it impact us? Absolutely not. It says, "No in all these things, these real tangible things, we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us." I sometimes wonder and compare different world-views that respond to challenge and suffering. A classic response within perhaps a Buddhist tradition is to seek a kind of karmic distance, a removal from reality to find a kind of higher plane where you can be separate from all suffering. The Christian faith does not suggest that at all. The Christian faith recognises that problems are real, that pain is real, that difficulties are tangible, true things. But what it also says is that something higher and wider and deeper and richer has happened, that supersedes even the most extreme forms of suffering.

So Paul goes into superlatives at the end of chapter 8:

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul sometimes runs into these long sentences where he can't think of anything fully to say to express everything he wants to express. He's saying, "Nothing, absolutely nothing, no matter what you can imagine: our past? No. Our present? No. Our future, no. Spiritual beings, no. Nothing, absolutely nothing can separate us from this anchored, fixed New Covenant situation that we have in Jesus Christ." Remember what I said earlier about the promises of Isaiah. Towards the end of that section I said that God said, "I will set up an everlasting covenant with you, an everlasting covenant." And this was the New Covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ. Remember the words of the Last Supper⁷, "This is my blood, given for you, a new covenant in my blood for the forgiveness

6 Psalm 44:22

7 Matthew 26:28

of sins." There is something now that is so cast-iron established that no matter what creaks and aches and pains and challenges and difficulties or plagues or wars are going to happen in our world, none of that affects, ultimately, the future plan that God has for us, and a renewed world to come. He is going to make it happen. Just as He promised to Israel that He would work out His saving power and His saving plan. And He would definitely do it and His world would not fall, in the same way, He speaks to Christians. And He says, "No matter what happens, nothing can separate you now from Me. Nothing can separate you from your future. Nothing can separate you from the promise of a renewed body in a new world where you will rule and reign as Adam and Eve were meant to right at the beginning,"

Like Abraham, you're justified by faith, like the patriarchs who truly believed, you're saved and forgiven. And the sins that rested on the people of Israel, and on the whole of humanity are now paid for and dealt with, because of the death of God's own Son.

So this is a big crescendo, this chapter 8. I'm not going to spend too much more time, but what I would want to say to you is this: read Romans 8 and read it again, and read it again, and maybe start to see how it fits into the larger narrative that someone like Paul would be carrying as a Second Temple Jew. This great hope that God would actually be faithful to His promises, to His covenant promises were something that they wrestled with: "God, are You really going to do it?" And they were disheartened because they thought the story of Israel disqualified them perhaps, yet they knew that it was based on God's word, not on their performance. So we get the Good News that in Christ, in Jesus Christ, God has actually been faithful to the covenant in a way that no-one could have imagined.

Hence, the great sigh of relief and the tremendous celebration. All of the things that we're longed for: a new world, under God, filled with His light, renewed, not like the deserts of the wilderness but renewed to be, you know, a blossoming, blooming place, with raised people in them, following God, no longer held down by a dreaded sinful nature, but free. All of these things will come to pass. That's what Paul celebrates in this high point of his letter in Romans. Romans 8 is something to chew on, to return to, to enjoy. And then afterwards you'll start to see the application of it, increasingly again focusing into practicalities later on, where Paul says, "If God has done all of this, how on earth could Jews and Gentiles be separate any longer? You're one in Jesus Christ." So the letter eventually gets pastoral and draws these two groups in together.

So let me leave that with you. Let me finish there. I'll close with a prayer. Like I said, use your time to focus in on the letter of Romans, it will give power and grace and peace your soul, if you chew on this and let the truth of it sink in. Let's pray.

Father, I feel profoundly inadequate at reading through this extraordinary text. It is, it is amazing in every single line.

What changes have happened because of Jesus, despite ourselves.

Father, we praise You, that You have truly been faithful to what you promised. We thank You, Father, that by sending Your Son, You did what we could not do. And Lord, I thank you that there are millions and millions of people who have been adopted, are justified and will be glorified in the future. We thank You, Lord, that these things are guaranteed, not by our behaviour, but because of Christ's intercession and His faithfulness, more than our faith, even. So would you bless us, would you give us your grace and would you cause us to grow into the likeness of your Son.

In Jesus' Name.

Amen.

Thank you. Thanks for listening, and I will see you again soon.

[Transcribed by Hamish Blair with help from <https://otter.ai>]

[NIVUK] Extracts from the Holy Bible, New International Version Anglicised, copyright © 1979, 1984, 2011 Biblica, formerly International Bible Society. [Used by permission](#) of Hodder & Stoughton Publishing, an Hachette UK company. All rights reserved. 'NIV' is a registered trademark of Biblica. UK trademark number 1448790

Please note: Andrew was actually reading from the 1984 NIV, UK edition., which was not written with inclusive language. In 2011 a number of other minor revisions were made which also affect the wording in Romans 8. The 2011 text is included in "Liberation Serif / Times New Roman" font because it is easier to copy from a digital source (www.biblegateway.com) and it is more reliable than text from otter.ai.

Capitalisation of pronouns for the Trinity is not done in Bible quotations, because that is not the style in the NIV.