“From Futility To Hope”

October 7, 2018

Isaiah 65:17-25

Please find with me the eighth chapter of the Book of Romans.

A few years ago I read a book titled “Anna Karenina” and totally enjoyed it. The author, a Russian, by name of the Leo Tolstoy, was of the greatest writers of all time was. At one point in his life, the point where he had become the most famous Russian writer and when his health was extremely good and with a wife and with a family of ten children and with a very large estate and with plenty of money, Tolstoy took stock of his life and concluded that he had achieved nothing.

Here is the greatest of the Russian writers at the top of his profession at the age of fifty-one. *“Had I simply understood that life had no meaning I could have borne it quietly, knowing that that was my lot. But I could not satisfy myself with that. Had I been like a man living in a wood from which he knows there is no exit, I could have lived;*

*but I was like one lost in a wood who, horrified at having lost his way, rushes about wishing to find the road. He knows that each step he takes confuses him more and more, but still he cannot help rushing about. It was indeed terrible. And to rid myself of the terror I wished to kill myself.”* [Found on [www.brainpickings.org](http://www.brainpickings.org) “Leo Tolstoy on Finding Meaning in a Meaningless World” by Maria Popova].

He became completely disillusioned with everything. Sitting at the top of his profession as a renowned writer, Tolstoy fell into the extreme depths of despair. He lost his purpose for living as well as his passion for his work. In a word, the man began to feel that his life was an exercise in futility.

I’ve titled today’s sermon “From Futility to Hope.” Shall we pray?

Here’s how Tolstoy described this time in his life. *“My question … was the simplest of questions, lying in the soul of every man from the foolish child to the wisest elder: it was a question without an answer to which one cannot live, as I had found by experience. It was: “What will come of what I am doing today or shall do tomorrow? What will come of my whole life?” Differently expressed, the question is: “Why should I live, why wish for anything, or do anything?” It can also be expressed thus: “Is there any meaning in my life that the inevitable death awaiting me does not destroy?”* [Found on [www.brainpickings.org](http://www.brainpickings.org) “Leo Tolstoy on Finding Meaning in a Meaningless World” by Maria Popova].

Those who have read “Anna Karenina” or “War and Peace,” know why Tolstoy was counted the greatest of the Russian writers in his day. But in 1879 at the age of fifty-one, this very capable and remarkable writer came to a conclusion that all he had done in his life he’d done for all the wrong reasons. And, for lack of a better term, Tolstoy entered a personal inner world of futility, where life had become pointless and useless. He felt that he had achieved nothing, least of all success, with his life.

So, he began to search for answers. He tried to find the answer in science. Here’s his conclusion on finding the answer in science. *“Experimental science only then gives positive knowledge and displays the greatness of the human mind when it does not introduce into its investigations the question of an ultimate cause.”* [See above].

Next, he turned to philosophy for help to his feelings of meaninglessness. Here’s his answer after searching for help in philosophy. *“Philosophy not merely does not reply, but is itself only asking that question.”* *It was like this: I, my reason, have acknowledged that life is senseless. If there is nothing higher than reason (and there is not: nothing can prove that there is), then reason is the creator of life for me.*

*If reason did not exist there would be for me no life. How can reason deny life when it is the creator of life? Or to put it the other way: were there no life, my reason would not exist; therefore reason is life’s son. Life is all. Reason is its fruit yet reason rejects life itself! I felt that there was something wrong here.* [See above].

Next, he tried spirituality. He studied Buddhism, Muhammadanism, and the Christianity of the Russian Orthodox Church, in which he had been baptized as an infant. His conclusion on the Church; *“They did not live according to the principles they professed.”* That resulted in his determining that the Russian Orthodox Church was a sham.

Tolstoy then ended this search by writing another book. He called it “Confession,” in which he showed that when life and work and even religion are all outward, life is futile.

Next, he embarked on a three-year search for God. Here’s where he ended up. *“I understood the truth that I later found in the Gospel, the truth that people clung to darkness and shunned the light because their deeds were evil. For he who does evil hates the light and will not venture into the light, lest his deeds be revealed.” …*

*“For man to be able to live he must either not see the infinite, or have such an explanation of the meaning of life as will connect the finite with the infinite.” …“What, then, do I seek?” a voice cried out within me. “He is there, the one without whom there could be no life.” To know God and to live come to one and the same thing. God is life.”*

And here is his conclusion *“While Christ's teaching is not only a doctrine which gives rules which a man must follow, it unfolds a new meaning in life…”* [Leo Tolstoy, “The Kingdom of God is Within You”].

Tolstoy is one in a long line of souls that lived and worked and carried out their daily responsibilities and either gradually or one day woke up to the realization that to have a true purpose in life you must find that purpose in your Creator God.

And you also may have heard or read about a man named John Milton. Milton was a seventeenth century writer, English statesman, poet and first of all, a Christian. At the age of forty-six Milton went blind. He then lived another twenty years as a blind man.

Here’s what Milton wrote in a poem called “On His Blindness.”

When I consider how my light is spent,  
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide  
And that one Talent which is death to hide  
Lodged with me useless, though my Soul more bent  
To serve therewith my Maker, and present  
My true account, lest he returning chide;  
“Does God exact day-labor, light denied?”  
I fondly ask. But patience, to prevent  
That murmur, soon replies, “God doth not need  
Either man’s work or his own gifts; who best  
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state  
Is Kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed  
And post o’er Land and Ocean without rest:  
They also serve who only stand and wait.”

So, yes, you can find many examples of meaningless lives. But there are also the Miltons of this world. So, where would you go for a solution to the question of meaninglessness? Does the Bible give us God’s answer futility? Well, fortunate-ly for us, the answer is found right here in the Book of Romans in this eight chapter. Let’s see if you can find it with me; verse eighteen.

Romans 8:18 *“For I reckon [count true what is true] that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (19) For the earnest expectation of the creature [creation] waiteth for the manifestation [revelation] of the sons of God.*

*(20) For the creature [creation] was made subject to vanity [futility], not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, (21) Because the creature [creation] itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. (22) For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.*

*(23) And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit [namely], the redemption of our body. (24) For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? (25) But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.”*

Surprisingly, you can find the answer to futility in the physical world all around you. The creation, according to these verses, has been subjected to vanity; or, in other words, futility.

The word “futility” means “pointless and useless exist-ence.” Here it is in verse twenty. And, as we read it, look for what Paul says about the physical world; verse twenty. Romans 8:20 *“For the creature [creation] was made subject to* ***vanity*** *[futility], not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, (21) because the creature [creation] itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.”*

Here’s what’s on my heart today. I want to direct you to an aspect of the creation that you’ll only find the truth about when you go to the Bible.

The Old English “vanity” means “futility, purposeless-ness, and emptiness.” The word is found just three times in the New Testament. But, it’s found thirty-three times in the twelve chapters of the Book of Ecclesiastes. So, really, the best Book of the Bible on the question of futility is Ecclesiastes. And so, practically speaking, the Bible is totally clear on this one fact. Everything under the sun comes down to futility if you put all your time and energy in yourself and choose to live your life apart from God. Ecclesiastes 1:2 *“…all is vanity. (3) What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?”*

That’s how Ecclesiastes begins. But, what is just so glorious about the Bible is this. The LORD has the answer to Solomon’s question. What does the LORD have for us for today from Romans eight?

Here are just two things I’d like you to see. But, I want you to see that they are very closely connected. And they are futility and the creation around us.

Did you notice that Paul focuses here on the creation four times these four verses of Romans eight? Romans 8:19 *“For the earnest expectation of* ***the creature [creation]*** *waiteth for the manifestation [revelation] of the sons of God. (20) For* ***the creature [creation]*** *was made subject to vanity [futility], not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope,*

*(21) Because* ***the creature [creation]*** *itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. (22) For we know that* ***the whole creation*** *groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.”*

So, first, God’s creation points us to God.

A creation implies a Creator just like something made implies a Maker. Everything in the universe has been designed, made, and is held together, not by some unseen force of nature; but by an All-powerful Person, the Creator of the heavens and the earth. By the way, have you noticed that even the Unbeliever speaks of the creation as though it had a mother? They refer to it as “Mother Nature.”

But something has been lost. Something wonderful has gotten lost. What I mean is this. You all studied or are study-ing science in High School. Do you remember learning that what science really is is a study of the Creator and His creation?

We study gravity and we study thermo-dynamics and the laws of physics and the theory of relativity and the theory of evolution and the laws of motion and the speed of light and the variety of temperature and mass and quantum mechanics and such. But do you know what all of those laws and principles are? They are ingenious inventions of a Creator. All the creation around you points to a wonderful, All-powerful Being; Someone with perfect intelligence, Who designed everything and Who holds it all together every minute and every second of the day.

So, we’ve lost something when we neglect to mention or teach that all the creation around us was designed by a Perfect, loving Creator. Yes, it’s science. But science is “knowledge.” And knowledge comes from Someone Who knows. And, in this case, knows everything.

And why should you believe that God made the entire physical universe? Because the whole thing is reflection and a reminder of the glory of God. Look at the sky and the sun and the planets and the stars and the constellations and the galaxies and even the clouds and the rainfall and the rainbows. It’s all an announcement that God is everywhere present and that He’s our all-powerful Creator.

Psalm 19:1 *“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. (2) Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.”*

The earth, the other planets, the sun and the other stars, the galaxies, the oceans, the deserts, the continents, the millions of microscopic animals, snow, rain, islands in the ocean, droughts, erosion; everything points to an Excellent Creator. Has it ever occurred to you that a one hundred foot tall tree gets is water from its roots. Did you know that one of the giant sequoia trees in California is over 375 feet tall and is almost a thousand years old (and it wasn’t even discovered until August 2006)? You say, “But how?”

So, first, says Paul, all of the universe points us to Creator God.

But, have you ever thought about where the universe is headed? Have you ever thought about what’s happening in the creation at this exact moment? Paul tells us.

Second, the universe groans and groaning is good. Look with me at verse twenty-two.

Romans 8:22 *“For we know that* ***the whole creation groaneth*** *and travaileth in pain together until now.”*

Groaning is good. Now, why do I say that? Here’s why. The physical creation itself has been subjected to futility. The LORD says that the entire universe joins together in one collective groan.

To groan means to *“make a low sound usually because of pain.”* But what sort of groaning does the universe display? Again, verse twenty-two. Romans 8:22 *“For we know that the whole creation groaneth and* ***travaileth in pain*** *together until now.”*

And the Christian who knows his Bible knows exactly why the creation is groaning. The reason? Something is wrong in the world. Something went *drastically* wrong sometime in the past. On the day that Adam and Eve chose to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, something wrong happened to the universe. Genesis 3:17 *“And unto Adam he 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;*

*(18) Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; (19) in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”*

You see, the physical world around us has been disturbed. All of creation is beautiful and, even with all that beauty and wonder, it groans. And the reason is found in the fact of sin. Sin hasn’t just affected the moral capacity of human race. Sin didn’t just send mankind outside of fellowship with God. It also devastated the physical world.

There’s something wrong with the creation. The stars, the planets, the animals, even the plants; everything groans. Glaciers groan. Thunder booms. Lightning flashes. Whales moan. Even the wind moans and groans as it blows. And how about the howling of a tornado?

But that’s not all the LORD tells us about this groaning. He tells us why. Look again at the twenty-second verse. Romans 8:22 *“For we know that the whole creation groaneth and* ***travaileth in pain*** *together until now.”*

This word travail is the word used to describe the pains of a mother when she is giving birth to her child. And yes, there’s a lot than can be said here about the pains of child-birth. But the most important point here is this. The travail of the mother during the time when she is bringing her child into this world, travails in hope. As every mother knows, the pain of the process seems to vanish when that little baby is placed into her arms.

God’s plan for the creation is just like that. Why else would the Holy Spirit use the word “travail”? So, to this very moment, the world around us is looking forward in hope to a day when the curse of sin will be removed.

Ever wonder why there is pain and suffering and crying and tears? It all goes back to the day Adam and Eve chose disobedience over trusting God’s word. And yet, all of the suffering of this present time can’t begin to be compared to the glory that will be revealed in the children of God.

Romans 8:18 *“For I reckon [count true what is true] that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (19) For the earnest expectation of the creature [creation] waiteth for the manifestation [revelation] of the sons of God.”* Paul calls that day the revelation of the sons of God.

Romans 8:21*“Because the creature [creation] itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into* ***the glorious liberty of the children of God****.”*

The universe aches to be delivered from its own corrupt-tion. You see, the answer to the groaning of creation is found in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. And what do you think will happen on that day?

Revelation 21:3 *“And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.*

*(4) And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be* ***no more death****, neither sorrow, nor crying,* ***neither shall there be any more pain****: for the former things are passed away.”*

Revelation 22:1 *“And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.*

*(2) In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. (3) 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: …”*

God has plan for the future of this physical world. The LORD’s plan for the universe is this; no more death, no more pain, and no more curse. In other words, the universe groans for the day when it will be delivered from its present bondage. No more groaning. All of creation, the entire universe, will be set free from the curse of sin, from decay and death, and from pain.

Everything at his very moment is subject to the second law of thermodynamics, the law of entropy, everything is running down; everything is breaking down. Folks, even gold and silver can rust. Moths can eat both silk and cotton. Moths can eat fur, felt; even feathers. And, have you ever thought about all your possessions. Thieves can break in and steal your jewelry as well as your chicken sandwich. And all of that will be stopped.

You see, it comes to an end because one day God will dwell here. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be here on this earth. Revelation 21:3 *“And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.”*

You see, just like the pains of childbirth lead to the birth of your baby; so, the creation travails in hope that one day the curse of sin will be removed. Everything around us aches to be set free from the corruption that constant erodes it. And because of Christ and what He did on the Cross, the entire universe will be relieved from its bondage. Yes, even the physical world benefits from the Cross of Christ.

Folks, if the LORD has this much concern for the future of the universe, do you think He has any less concern for what’s in store for your future?

First, God’s creation points us to God.

Second, the universe groans and groaning is good.

Third, and last, but not least, we can’t live without hope. Everybody needs hope; verse twenty-three. Romans 8:23 *“And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, [namely] the redemption of our body.*

*(24) For we are saved by* ***hope****: but* ***hope*** *that is seen is not* ***hope****: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet* ***hope*** *for? (25) But if we* ***hope*** *for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.”*

The answer to futility is found in hope. The universe constantly reminds us God is here. He made us. And, since He’s everywhere, our hearts will only be most satisfied when we realize that He wants *us* to be near Him.

We know, Paul says, that the creation is groaning with a groaning like a mother in labor, anticipating with joy the birth of her child. So, is the world a futile existence, as some evolutionists would like us to think? Or, is there a hope in the heart of the universe; a hope that one day God will set everything right?

So, in light of these two things, we know that, just like the universe is looking forward to the future when the sons of God will be revealed, so too, every person here needs hope.

Someone has said that the distinguishing factor in Christianity when it’s compared to world religions is hope. I Timothy 1:1 *“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope; …”*

And the reason we say that there is so much hope in Christianity is simple. Hope is best found when it’s found in a Person, the Person of Jesus Christ Himself.

You see, the universe is moving towards this one magnificent goal; the redemption of our body. Romans 8:21 “*because the creature [creation] itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.”*

And the creation longs for the day when our human bodies will be sinless human bodies. Paul calls it the redemption of the body, verse twenty-two.

Romans 8:22 *“For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. (23) And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, [namely]* ***the redemption of our body****.”*

Yes, our physical bodies will one day be raised from out of the grave. And yes, our physical bodies will one day be sinless.

Now, last how can this passage be a help today?

Who is your hope? Not, what is your hope? But, “Who is your Hope?”

Jesus went all the way to Calvary for one primary reason; to deal with your sin. On the Cross Jesus became the Hope of every sinner.

I Peter 1:3 *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, …”*

Hebrews 6:19 *“Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; …”*

Who is your Hope? Is His Name Jesus Christ? Acts 4:12 *“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”*

The following is a true story. Quite a few years ago there lived a man named William Cowper. And William was a Christian. But he had some very serious concerns in his life. He was very shy and had lots of anxiety. And he battled with depression; deep depression; for years. At one point in his life in 1763, William spent eighteen months in a mental institution.

One day William decided to end it all. So, he arranged for someone to pick him up in a carriage and drive him (by horse carriage) to the Thames River where he planned on jumping off a bridge into the river and drown himself. When his carriage driver realized what he was doing, he caught him and dragged him back into the carriage and took him back home.

William, at home that night, then took a knife and stabbed himself. But as he fell, the knife blade broke and he couldn’t complete the job. So, he found a rope, hung it high on a rafter and put it around his neck as the morning light rose. But, a neighbor entered his room just as he was began to hang himself and cut him down. He became ever more despondent, thinking that he was so bad he couldn’t even successfully commit suicide.

Later that week a Pastor from the Church stopped in to see him. That Pastor’s name was John Newton. And William Cowper became friends with Pastor Newton. And William was a poet; actually a hymn-writer. He and Newton then wrote a hymnal together called the Olney Hymns. And, wouldn’t you know it; inside that hymnal was a hymn Newton wrote called “Amazing Grace.” But another hymn in that hymnal written by William Cowper was this one titled “God Moves In A Mysterious Way.”

Here’s Cowper’s hymn.

1. God moves in a mysterious way  
   His wonders to perform;  
   He plants His footsteps in the sea  
   And rides upon the storm.

    2. Deep in unfathomable mines  
    Of never failing skill  
    He treasures up His bright designs  
    And works His sov’reign will.

    3. Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;  
    The clouds ye so much dread  
    Are big with mercy and shall break  
    In blessings on your head.

   4. Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
    But trust Him for His grace;  
    Behind a frowning providence  
    He hides a smiling face.

    5. His purposes will ripen fast,  
    Unfolding every hour;  
    The bud may have a bitter taste,  
  But sweet will be the flow’r.

6. Blind unbelief is sure to err  
    And scan His work in vain;  
    God is His own interpreter,  
    And He will make it plain.

God’s answer’s come when we completely surrender ourselves to Him.

Graham Kendrick

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F5-DQmhKPY4

You see, for the Christian, there’s tremendous hope. God will, one day, make things right.

So, when those days of meaningless come upon you, take it all to the LORD. He’s the Only One Who can strengthen and support you. The world won’t care like your Father cares. And the devil certainly doesn’t want you to have confidence in Him.

But your answer for futility is found in Jesus.

Shall we pray?

Hymn # 539 “My Faith Looks Up To Thee”