

Day 11 — Death Has Lost Its Sting

1 Corinthians 15:55-57

“Christ has delivered us from the fear of death.”—John Owen

The fear of death is universal.

The fear of death is a driving theme in the popular Harry Potter series. Voldemort spends seven books trying to avoid death. He splits his soul. He murders. He seeks immortality. Ironically, the more he fears death, the less human he becomes. Dumbledore exposes this fear saying, “Indeed, your failure to understand that there are things much worse than death has always been your greatest weakness.”¹

The fear of death is not fiction though.

Death intimidates everyone.

It waits in hospital rooms, funeral homes, nursing facilities, and quiet phone calls that change lives forever. Even people who rarely think about eternity instinctively fear death because deep down we know something is wrong.

Death feels unnatural because it is.

The Lord of life did not create us to die.

Death is an enemy intruder—a consequence of rebellion.

But in one of the most triumphant passages in all of Scripture, Paul openly mocks death itself.

He writes: “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:55)

Imagine how shocking those words must have sounded.

Human beings normally speak about death with fear, sorrow, and silence. Paul speaks about death like a defeated enemy.

These words are astonishing.

Throughout human history, death conquered everyone. Pharaohs. Caesars. Alexander the Great. Genghis Khan. Death eventually swallowed up every king and kingdom alike. Death was undefeated.

¹ J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (New York: Scholastic, 2003), 718.

Then came Jesus.

He entered the grave for three days, and then rose in glory, bodily, as the first fruits of many to come.

From the vantage point of Jesus' victory over death at the cross, Paul is now emboldened to mock this once terrifying enemy.

Here's the logic of his confidence.

Who fears a bee when you know it's stinger has been removed?

Nobody.

Similarly, who fears death when you know that Jesus has promised us resurrection life? Paul celebrates over death the way Israel celebrated after David defeated Goliath. Before the victory, they were shaking in their sandals. When Goliath hit the dust, they chased the Philistines out of town with screams of joy.

One victory changed everything.

Why?

Because Jesus walked out of His grave alive.

Paul explains that "the sting of death is sin."

Death terrifies humanity because sin brings guilt, condemnation, and judgment before a holy God.

The real horror of death is not merely physical dying. The deeper terror is standing condemned before God.

The first death is just a prelude to the greater second death.

But Jesus absorbed that condemnation at the cross.

He bore the punishment sinners deserved and then rose victorious over death itself.

That means death no longer possesses ultimate authority over believers.

Christ's victory over sin does not mean we escape earthly sorrows.

Christians still grieve.

Funerals still hurt.

Believers still cry at gravesides because separation and loss remain painful.

Even Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus.

But the resurrection changes the meaning of death forever.

For believers, the grave is no longer a prison. It has become temporary.

Paul declares: “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 15:57)

Notice victory is not something Christians achieve through courage, morality, or effort.

God gives victory through Christ.

That means believers do not face death alone.

One day Jesus will fully destroy death forever.

Graves will empty.

Tears will cease.

Suffering will end.

Christians will one day attend the funeral of death itself.

And the enemy that once terrified humanity will disappear forever beneath the reign of King Jesus.

Because Christ conquered death, Christians can live courageously now.

The resurrection means the worst thing that can happen to a believer is never the last thing.

Discussion Questions

1. Why does death feel so frightening to humanity?
2. What does Paul mean by the “sting” of death?
3. How did Jesus defeat death at the cross and resurrection?
4. Why can Christians grieve and still possess hope?
5. How should Christ’s victory over death shape courage and faithfulness today?

Part 3 — Groaning and Hope

Day 12 — The Math of Eternity

Romans 8:18

“Oh, when I look on this glorious place [Heaven], what a dunghill and dungeon the earth starts to seem.”—Richard Baxter²

As a child, I watched a television show where a man died, briefly experienced heaven, and then returned to life. His wife celebrated by cooking his favorite meal. To everyone's surprise, he could barely eat it. Having tasted the joys of heaven, even his favorite earthly pleasures suddenly seemed small by comparison.

That's essentially Paul's argument in Romans 8:18.

Human beings constantly calculate earthly losses.

We think about opportunities we missed, money we lost, relationships that failed, years that disappeared, and sacrifices that feel costly. Suffering has a way of consuming our attention because pain always feels immediate and heavy.

The apostle Paul understood suffering deeply. He endured slander, imprisonment, beatings, rejection, persecution, hunger, broken relationships, and constant danger.

Yet Paul writes something astonishing: “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” (Romans 8:18)

The word for “consider” is a mathematical and accounting term.³

Paul imagines a ledger.

On one side he begins writing in the earthly losses column:

Beatings.

Imprisonments.

Rejection.

² Richard Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, 135.

³ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). In [A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature](#) (3rd ed., p. 597). University of Chicago Press. BDAG says, “to determine by mathematical process, reckon, calculate.”

Hunger.

Persecution.

Danger.

Do you calculate your losses in your own soul?

Broken Dreams.

Financial hardship.

Loneliness.

The death of a loved one.

If your eyes remain fixed on that side of the ledger too long, those losses can sink your soul.

But Paul doesn't stop there.

He begins writing in the future gains column:

Resurrection body.

Eternal life.

Uninhibited joy.

A New Heavens and a new earth.

Freedom from sin.

Jesus. Face to face.

God Himself.

And suddenly the comparison becomes impossible.

The weight of glory tips the scales so dramatically that Paul puts down the calculator.

The comparison becomes as ridiculous as comparing a dungeon to a palace.

Even earth's greatest losses cannot begin to compare with the future that awaits God's people.

Notice Paul is not minimizing suffering.

He is comparing suffering to something infinitely greater.

Eternity changes the math.

Romans 8 goes on to show that all of creation groans alongside Christians awaiting redemption. The brokenness we experience now is real. The ache is real. The suffering is real.

But it is not ultimate.

Jim Elliot is credited with writing:

"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

That's the accounting of heaven.

Shortly after writing these words, Elliot's heavenly accounting was tested by profound earthly loss. In 1956, he and four missionaries were speared to death while bringing the gospel to the Waorani people of Ecuador.

From an earthly perspective, their story looked tragic.

A young wife lost her husband.

A daughter lost her father.

A church lost a missionary.

But the story did not end there.

Elisabeth Elliot later returned to the tribe, and many came to faith in Christ. What looked like devastating loss became part of a much larger story of eternal glory.

If Jim Elliot could speak to us today, he would not tell us his losses were small.

They were enormous.

But he would tell us they are not worth comparing with the weight of glory he now enjoys in Christ.

Christians often calculate suffering while barely considering glory.

We ask:

- What will obedience cost?

- What sacrifices will faithfulness require?
- What pleasures might we lose?
- Is it worth it?

Paul invites believers to place those temporary losses beside eternal joy.

And when eternity enters the equation, comparison becomes impossible.

C.S. Lewis wrote: “They say of some temporal suffering, ‘No future bliss can make up for it,’ not knowing that Heaven, once attained, will work backwards and turn even that agony into a glory.”⁴

One day every believer will discover that Paul was right.

Sufferings were real.

Tears mattered.

The losses hurt.

But the glory is greater.

Eternity changes the math.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do present hardships often feel overwhelming?
2. How does eternity reshape the way Christians view suffering?
3. What sacrifices for Christ feel costly to you right now?
4. Why is future glory difficult to fully imagine?
5. How does the promise of heaven strengthen endurance today?

⁴ C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 69.

Day 13 — Suffering Is Not Strange

Romans 8:16-17

“You and I will suffer. It’s not a matter of if; it’s a matter of when.”—Paul Tripp⁵

Suffering feels strange.

It feels even stranger when you've lived for years without experiencing much of it.

Early in ministry, the Lead Pastor I served under died suddenly, leaving behind a young wife, two boys, and a stunned church. As the Associate Pastor, I would need to preach an Easter sermon to a grieving church just two days later. I remember sitting on my couch late at night working on a sermon and weeping over the loss of my friend. I could hardly process all the pain.

The suffering felt so strange I didn’t know what to do with it. Previous losses suddenly felt small. It felt like the safety had been taken off life.

Like many Christians, I quietly assumed suffering meant something had gone wrong.

We might not claim to believe the prosperity gospel with our words, but our sorrows often reveal faulty expectations.

We expect that, if we live right and believe right, life should generally go well. We assume life will be relatively safe, comfortable, and predictable.

When trials come, believers often wonder:

- Is God disappointed with me?
- Have I failed spiritually?
- Why would God allow this?

We naturally associate blessing with comfort and hardship with abandonment.

But the apostle Paul says suffering is not strange for the people of God.

He writes: “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs— heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.” (Romans 8:16–17)

Notice Paul connects suffering and glory.

⁵ Paul David Tripp, *Suffering: Gospel Hope When Life Doesn't Make Sense* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 21.

Jesus suffered for us at the cross.

Then He was raised from the dead.

That's the pattern of the Christian life.

Suffering.

Then glory.

Union with Christ means believers share not only in His future inheritance, but also in His present sufferings.

Jesus Himself warned His followers that discipleship would involve difficulty. Christians follow a crucified Savior before entering resurrection glory.

That means suffering is not necessarily evidence God has abandoned His people.

Often, suffering confirms believers truly belong to Him.

Throughout Scripture, God repeatedly uses suffering like a furnace to refine faith.

Gold is purified through fire. Faith often deepens through hardship.

Many believers can testify that their greatest spiritual growth happened not during seasons of ease, but during seasons of weakness, grief, disappointment, or loss.

Suffering has a way of exposing idols, deepening prayer, humbling pride, and teaching dependence upon God.

It also teaches believers to long for the world to come. Pain reminds us that this present world is not our home and that our deepest hope lies beyond it.

None of that means suffering itself is good.

Cancer is not good.

Grief is not good.

Betrayal is not good.

Death is not good.

But God works powerfully even through painful things.

Joni Eareckson Tada once said: “God permits what He hates to accomplish what He loves.”⁶

That does not remove pain, but it reminds believers suffering is never meaningless in the hands of a sovereign God.

And Romans 8 reminds Christians the story does not end in suffering.

It ends in glory.

Every hardship believers endure now is temporary compared to the eternal inheritance awaiting them in Christ.

C.S. Lewis shows how future glory will work backwards into present sufferings in the Great Divorce: “They say of some temporal suffering, 'No future bliss can make up for it,' not knowing that Heaven, once attained, will work backwards and turn even that agony into glory.”⁷

Christians do not minimize suffering.

They simply know suffering is not the end of the story.

Because of Christ, the worst thing is never the last thing.

Discussion Questions

1. Why does suffering often confuse Christians?
2. What does Romans 8 teach about the relationship between suffering and glory?
3. How can suffering deepen dependence upon God?
4. What idols or weaknesses does hardship often expose?
5. How does future glory help believers endure present suffering?

⁶ Joni Eareckson Tada, *The God I Love: A Lifelong Journey with Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 287.

⁷ C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: HarperOne, 2001), 69.

Day 14 — Creation Groans for Glory

Romans 8:19-22

"Christ by His passion and death achieved the renewal of heaven and earth."—Herman Bavinck⁸

Something feels wrong with the world.

You feel it every time you hear about war, natural disasters, disease, broken relationships, violence, or death.

Even creation itself seems restless.

Hurricanes destroy communities.

Wildfires consume forests.

Bodies decay.

Cemeteries expand.

The world is beautiful, but it is also painfully broken.

Charles Darwin famously struggled with the problem of suffering in nature. Reflecting on a parasitic wasp that lays its eggs inside living caterpillars, he wondered how a good and all-powerful God could design such a world.⁹

Paul agrees that something is wrong with creation.

But he gives a different explanation.

He writes: "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God." (Romans 8:19)

Paul pictures creation itself groaning like a person longing for relief.

Ever since sin entered the world through Adam, the curse has affected everything. Human rebellion did not merely damage people spiritually. It disrupted the entire created order.

That is why creation no longer functions as God originally intended.

⁸ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, vol. 3, *Sin and Salvation in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 451–452.

⁹ Charles Darwin to Asa Gray, May 22, 1860, in *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, ed. Francis Darwin, vol. 2 (London: John Murray, 1887), 105.

The world still contains breathtaking beauty because it remains God's creation. Sunsets still move us. Mountains still inspire awe. Oceans still remind people how small they are.

But everything is touched by decay.

Paul says creation was subjected to "futility."

Creation doesn't work the way it once did.

Earthquakes shake cities.

Viruses spread disease.

Predators hunt prey.

Hurricanes devastate coastlines.

Even our bodies betray us.

Creation groans.

Do you hear it?

Parasitic wasps.

Cancer diagnoses.

Category 5 hurricanes.

Terrifying Tsunamis.

Cemeteries running out of room.

They all speak not to a problem in God, but a problem with a creation that fell with Adam.

Yet creation does not groan hopelessly.

It groans expectantly.

In fact, Paul compares creation's groaning to the pains of childbirth (8:22). Labor pains hurt, but they announce that something glorious is coming.

Creation groans because creation is waiting.

Waiting for liberation.

Waiting for renewal.

Waiting for glory.

God is not abandoning His creation.

He is redeeming it.

The gospel is not God's escape plan from creation. It is His rescue plan for creation.

The future new creation will not merely be a repaired version of the present world. It will be complete restoration under the reign of Christ.

One pastor described it as not simply an "upgrade," but an "incalculable restoration."

Every beautiful experience Christians enjoy now is only a preview.

C.S. Lewis compared earthly beauty to the scent of a flower we have not yet found, the echo of a tune we have not yet heard, and news from a country we have never visited.

The world still whispers hints of Eden.

And Romans 8 reminds believers that God has not abandoned creation. He intends to redeem it.

That means Christians should neither worship creation nor despair over its brokenness.

Instead, believers live with hope.

One day storms will cease.

Disease will disappear.

Death will die.

And the groaning creation will finally give way to resurrection glory.

Isaiah says, "You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands" (55:12).

Can you imagine a fully restored universe?

Restored sunsets.

Restored waterfalls.

Restored oceans.

Restored Northern Lights.

Restored creation.

Restored wolves will snuggle up to restored lambs.

And, just maybe, a restored wasp will befriend a restored caterpillar.

Creation groans now.

But one day it will sing.

Discussion Questions

1. What evidence of creation's brokenness do you see most clearly?
2. Why does Paul describe creation as "groaning"?
3. How does the beauty of creation point toward God's future restoration?
4. Why is the promise of a new creation important to Christian hope?
5. How should future restoration shape the way believers live today?

Day 15 — We Groan With Hope

Romans 8:23-25

"Will he leave us sinning, suffering, groaning, dying daily, and come no more to us? It cannot be! Never fear: it cannot be."—Richard Baxter¹⁰

Baxter understood what Paul teaches in Romans 8: groaning is not evidence that God has abandoned His people. It is evidence that redemption is not yet complete.

Creation groans.

Christians groan too.

We groan when doctors deliver difficult news.

We groan over sinful desires we cannot seem to shake.

We groan over broken relationships.

We groan at gravesides and hospital beds.

We groan with the martyrs, crying, "How long, O Lord!"

The apostle Paul says: "We ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." (Romans 8:23)

Believers are not immune to weakness, suffering, disappointment, temptation, or grief. Christians still battle anxiety. They still bury loved ones. They still wrestle with unanswered questions.

Sometimes we assume mature Christians should always appear strong and unshaken. But Paul says even Spirit-filled Christians groan.

The difference is not that Christians groan less.

The difference is that Christians groan with hope.

Hope changes everything.

¹⁰ Richard Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1997), 45. Baxter continues, "Creation groans now, but God has not abandoned His creation. He intends to redeem it. Christians groan expectantly because believers know redemption is coming."

We live between Christ's first and second coming. We have already received forgiveness, adoption, and the Holy Spirit. Yet we still await the full realization of our adoption—the redemption of our bodies and the restoration of creation.

We have the firstfruits, but not yet the harvest.

We have the promise, but not yet the possession.

We have tasted grace, but we still long for glory.

That is why believers feel both joy and ache at the same time.

The Holy Spirit awakens this longing. The more we know Christ, the more we desire the day when faith becomes sight.

Matthew McCullough says, "Our hunger for something more is a precious ally, drawing us on toward the feast that is sure to come."¹¹

Sometimes suffering intensifies that longing. The harder life becomes, the more precious heaven appears.

C.S. Lewis observed something profound:

"Most people, if they had really learned to look into their own hearts, would know that they do want, and want acutely, something that cannot be had in this world. There are all sorts of things in this world that offer to give it to you, but they never quite keep their promise...If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world."¹²

Lewis believed earthly joys are not the destination. They are signposts. They awaken a longing they cannot satisfy and point us toward the world for which we were made.

The ache believers feel is often homesickness for eternity.

Paul says Christians "wait eagerly." Biblical hope is not vague optimism or wishful thinking. It is confident expectation rooted in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Because Christ walked out of His tomb, believers know they will walk out of theirs.

Because Christ was raised, every promise God has made will be fulfilled.

One day groaning will give way to glory.

¹¹ Matthew McCullough, *Remember Heaven: Meditations on the World to Come for Life in the Meantime* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2025), 142.

¹² C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (London: Collins, 1952; repr., New York: HarperOne, 2001), 135–137.

Faith will become sight.

Weakness will become resurrection.

Waiting will become rejoicing.

And every longing believers carry now will finally find its fulfillment in the presence of Christ.

Until then, Christians groan—but they groan with hope.

Discussion Questions

1. What causes you to groan most deeply in this season of life?
2. How does Christian groaning differ from hopeless despair?
3. Why do believers experience both joy and longing at the same time?
4. How does the Holy Spirit awaken desire for heaven?
5. What promises help Christians wait patiently for future glory?