

From Groans to Glory

by Vance Havner

Vance Havner's sermon explores the theme of suffering in creation and humanity, emphasizing the hope of glory that awaits believers amidst their groans.

Duration: 38:50

Scripture: Joel 2:17, Matthew 26:53, Luke 23:28, John 11:35, John 11:38, Romans 8:18-21

Topics: "Suffering"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the wonder and complexity of the human body, which God created as his masterpiece. He highlights the unique nature of human interaction, where we can only come close to understanding each other through looking into each other's eyes. The preacher also discusses how our senses, such as hearing and seeing, are dependent on our body parts but are not the actual body parts themselves. He warns against settling down in a worldly mindset and losing the desire for spiritual growth, using the analogy of a duck that ends up swimming in its own gravy. The sermon concludes by mentioning the importance of being sensitive to nature's testimony to God as the creator.

Transcript

And we read, beginning in verse 18, For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. Now you have the groan, the suffering, and the glory both in the same verse. For the earnest expectation of the creature waited for the manifestation of the sons of God.

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

Now there's another groan in the next verse, but we wait a moment for that. We have here the groaning of creation. Creation began with a garden, and every prospect was pleasing, and not even man was vile.

But the devil got into the garden, and sin began in the human race. And today we live in a ruined and wrecked world, still pretty in spots, but groaning in pain. The creatures of the animal world are under the reign of tooth and claw.

And no matter how many pretty pictures of African jungle life or somewhere else may come out in National Geographic magazine or some other nature magazine, it doesn't tell the whole story because there's an ugly side to nature, and there's indeed the reign of tooth and claw. And if you're sensitive to the voice of nature, and I hope you are, you don't get salvation that way, but you get a lot of blessings because the God who created this is our Father. You can detect that groan that runs through creation today.

My last conference, I've been resting for a couple of weeks, was up in New Jersey, and that's a wonderful spot. Plenty of room to walk as much as I like walking. And lakes with the ducks and the geese and the swan.

Oh, such an abundance of wonderful things. Birds galore, and you know that I'm a confirmed bird watcher. John Stodd, one of England's greatest preachers, is quite a bird watcher, and he took a text some time ago, Consider the Fowls of the Air.

He said, now that means watch birds. Well, it does, and it pays for you to do that. But nature has a voice that I hope you are to some degree sensitive to.

It has a testimony to God as creator. Some years ago, some travelers out in Africa were trying to sleep on the verge of the great desert out there. One of them was a veteran of that part of the country, the other a newcomer.

During the night, the stranger woke up. The other man said, what is that sound, that weird, strange sound that I hear? And his companion said, it is the desert sighing. That's a pretty good way to put it.

I live just across the street from the University of North Carolina in Greensboro. They don't have much woods left there to what was the campus, and what little there is right across the street from where I live. And during the spring and summer, I have been getting up early to make that a practice.

It has never made me healthy, wealthy, or wise, but I do it anyhow, because I like to. Somebody said one of the worst things about these folks getting up early, they like to brag about it, and I guess we do. But I find myself getting up, going across to that little patch of woods to hear my favorite of all the birds, the wood thrush, that sings his best early in the morning and late in the afternoon.

I go because he takes me back, turns time backward in his flight, and makes me a boy again, back on the farm, when even then the wood thrush was my favorite bird, because I think he is the best bird singer in eastern America. And a rather remarkable flutist he is. He sounds more like a flute.

Bird books all say that his song is so much the note of a flute. Somebody said if you saw a man seven feet tall coming down the street blowing a flute, what would you say? And somebody said, I'd say that's highfalutin. Well, this wood thrush is highfalutin, I tell you.

He really does it. And I don't think I'm stretching my imagination when I say that I do sense, I have better authority for that than myself, that I sense sometimes a longing on the part of nature for the manifestation of the sons of God. They may not know what that means, but there's a longing in the animate creation.

I believe it. Dr. A.T. Robertson, the great Greek scholar who not only taught Greek, but thought Greek, said, the mystical sympathy of physical nature with the work of grace is beyond the comprehension of most of us, but who can disprove it? You can't prove it, you can't disprove it. And then Goethe, the German writer, said, often have I had the sensation as if nature in a wailing sadness entreated something

of me so that not to understand what she longed for cut me to the heart.

And old John Keeble, who wrote so many wonderful songs, it was not then a poet's dream, a little vaunt, an idle vaunt of song, which bids me see in heaven or earth and all fair things around strong yearnings for a blessed new birth with sinless glories crowned. Now, Mr. Keeble felt that. He sensed and felt in his soul the groan that longs for the glory that is to come.

Have you ever had that in some favored spot? Up here's a good place. I take off every morning up this way, and these summers past, one of the little birds, the hooded warbler, most folks know he is such a bird, but he's been singing. I hope his progeny are still singing.

I didn't hear him this afternoon. It's not his favorite time anyhow. Maybe he'll show up in the morning.

But you sense something that you can't put, as these men could not put into words. It's a groaning world, and it's longing for something better. I don't know how much they know.

I don't know how they think or if they think in the sense that we do, but there's something there, and it's a groaning world of sorrow and heartbreak and suffering and pain. Have you ever wandered through a hospital for crippled children, really crippled children, and if your emotions could stand it, got through it looking at these poor twisted little bodies, and you came out the last door saying, my God, why? Why do they, why them? I don't have any answers for that. You don't either.

Or an old folks home, Lord bless them. I wandered some of them in there, dear soldier, and nobody loves them anymore. Nobody comes to visit some of them anymore.

Waiting to die, can't die, there they are, longing. When we find ourselves praying that we may not have to reach that chapter in our lives. Or when I was in Arlington, Virginia, in meetings right near the great National Cemetery.

Morning after morning, I would take off across those acres and acres and acres of graves where boys' bodies lie, faces turned toward God. And then in France, the great, perhaps his great, I don't know the size of that one, but in Flanders fields where poppies grow, between the crosses, row on row, thousands upon thousands who died, you might say, to what purpose? And especially, they have to say it after Vietnam, what was the use? You sense it. Now, I'm coming to the glory, but you better have a heart that feels some of the groan of creation.

Even teenagers today are not immune to the groan in life. They wouldn't have set a record for suicide in the last year or so. Teenagers of all people, and a lot of them want to talk about death today.

And they think about it more than you ever suspect. And there's worry and loneliness on the part of youth. Well, I'm glad my Savior was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, touched with the feeling of our infirmities.

But I move over to John 11, and there's some more groaning in that chapter. You remember, it's the scene at the grave of Lazarus. And I get to verse 32.

Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping, which came with her, he groaned in the Spirit, and was troubled, and said, Where

have you laid him? They told him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept, the shortest verse in the Bible, but oh, there's plenty of distance in it too.

And therefore, so that again in verse 38, Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. Now, why did he groan? What was he groaning about? Why did he weep? Was he hesitant to bring Lazarus back into this wretched poor world when he had got out of it and into a better one? I don't know. I rather think that Dr. Robertson, my Greek scholar again, is right.

And perhaps he is surmised that the word snorting there, the word groaning there in the original means snorting like an angry horse. As though my Lord was so mad at the devil for bringing about all this heartache and sorrow and wretchedness in this world that he groaned, but not exactly groaned, he fumed with a holy indignation about it. Now, we're to glory in tribulation, but we are not to glorify our tribulation.

That is where some good people go wrong. They try to make sin and suffering, they try to make accident and disease, try to put a halo around it somehow. It isn't in the book.

Jesus said in Luke 13, 16 about that poor woman all bound over, this woman whom Satan hath bound. He put the credit or the discredit where it belonged. He paid the devil in his own coin on that.

And he said, the devil will cast some of you into prison. He didn't say the government will put you in jail, the devil. And Paul wrote to the Thessalonians and said, I wanted to visit you, but it couldn't.

And he didn't give that reason that we preachers like to give sounds so preachy. I wasn't able to come because of providential hindrance. Sounds so good.

Paul said, I couldn't get there because the devil hindered this. And when he had that thorn in the flesh, he didn't say God sent it. He said it was the messenger of Satan.

So let's get the record straight. Don't glorify the trouble. You can honor God in the trouble.

And sometimes God allows the trouble. God allows some things to happen. And he causes some things to happen, permits some things to happen, but nothing ever happens because there's somebody on the throne of this universe and things don't happen.

I think he was grieved over the misery. Jesus knows all about our troubles. The sympathizing Jesus, the great physician, he, he knows about it.

But not only does creation groan and not only did Jesus groan, but that verse that I stopped short of a little while ago, over there in Romans again, we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption to wit, the redemption of our body. Dear friends, and some of you are old enough that you've been over a good deal of the road.

You've had some groaning in your time. And we could have quite a discussion of that. And many times, even the young are going through tragedy and trial.

Sometimes we don't realize. I'm getting more letters today than I ever got in my life. In the past seven years, God made up to some extent for my awful loneliness by myself today, traveling about over the land, with some of the most precious letters from every direction of people in trouble.

When I wrote that little book, though I walked through the valley, it sort of loosened all that. Another day, somebody out in South Dakota, never knew him, never heard of him, said, I've got a boy four, and he's the apple of my eye. Would you mind writing a letter to him that I can read to him when he grows up? That's a new one for me.

I wrote it. I said, I don't know, I'll be gone when he reads it. But you find out what people are going through in this world.

I find out I haven't had much trouble when I read some of the letters that I get. The whole creation. And then I turn over to 2 Corinthians 5, and you're acquainted with that.

Maybe that's taken right out of your experience. For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God and a house not made with hands eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven.

If so be it being clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan. You got any groans, friend? We groan being burdened, not for that we would be unclothed but clothed upon that mortality might be swallowed up of life.

We're strange contraptions. This human body is a, any doctor can tell you that the most, that there's just no end to the wonder of a human body. How God produced it as his masterpiece.

Something strange about you and your body. I've never seen you and you've never seen me. Do you know that? We go around in the body, that's the machine, little machine God gave us to run around in.

And we wear clothes, gradually getting away from that, looks like over the country. But a lot of folks, thank the Lord, still do. But I have never, the only way that you can come near, I look in your eyes, the windows of that body and you're looking out at me and I'm looking at you and that's the nearest you can get to it.

You don't hear with your ears, your ears don't hear, you hear with your ears. Your eyes can't see, you see with your eyes. Your tongue can't talk, take your tongue out, lay it on the table, what would it start talking about? Your tongue can't talk, you talk with your tongue.

Now you take the tenant out of the tenement and the tenement can't do a thing, dust to dust and ashes to ashes, that's the end of it. So there's something here, we call it soul, spirit, what you will, that operates all this apparatus. But one of these days the tenements go into pieces.

What happens to the tenant? Well with the Christian the spirit goes to be with Jesus, wonderful thing indeed, absent from the body, present with the Lord. Paul said he had a desire to depart and be with Christ which is far better. Do you ever get homesick for heaven? You say that's morbid, no it isn't, Paul was homesick for heaven, said so, why not? You've heard me tell about that fellow that was so seasick and he lost breakfast, lunch and supper all over the railing of the boat and one of these cheerful mortals who always comes along at the wrong time.

Came along slapped him on the back, chair up, seasickness never killed anybody, he said don't tell me that it's the hope of dying that's kept me alive this long. Sometimes I feel like it's the hope of dying keeps me going because we've got something to look forward to. I see nothing wrong singing in the sweet by and by just because most of our church members have settled for the here and now.

I still love the old song. The average church member has driven his tent pegs down in this world and he's at home thank you, not interested in the sweet by and by, not interested in anything much but getting rich or being popular, having a good time down here. I think of that wild duck that was flying across on migration with his companion.

He left them and came down into a barnyard and the food was plentiful around there for him and he stayed a week, he stayed a month and stayed the whole season. Then one day as he was feeding out there he heard that familiar honk way up in the sky and sensed that his erstwhile companions were returning. He tried to reach them, tried to fly but he had fed too well and could get no higher than the eaves of the barn and then the story goes that he settled back down and said let them go.

I like it here and the day came when he never even heard them when they went over. I've known people who once had an experience of the Lord and then saw his world. They grew up this little in the same by sweet age and they like it here.

There was a time in an old-fashioned song in an old town by some other sweet song would bring tears. Hearts had no desires they were doubts arise and caught the joyful sound the song of saints on higher ground. But you just feed long enough down here in this barnyard and that song won't move you anymore.

No sermon will move you anymore. You've settled down here and I may be talking to somebody here tonight for however religious you may look in this meeting. You have settled down here.

This is home to you. You're satisfied here. No sermon is going to shake you much anymore.

You don't have any yearning for the higher ground and the mount up with wings as eagles. It's a tragic thing indeed. So that duke stayed down there and the last time he went swimming it was in his own gravy.

Some people today are going to end up in a fix like that. You're fixing a gravy now to die. Oh but it says finally in Romans 8 26 we just we just can't get out of that one.

It tells us that that we are prayed for. Likewise the spirit also helpeth our infirmities for we knew not what we should pray for as we ought but the spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be earthed. I must confess to you that I hesitate when I come to that verse.

I am so inadequate to sound the depths of it that about as far as I can get when I get to that verse is this. If the state of creation and our own condition is so serious that the spirit of God intercedes for us in groaning beyond any words to express we'd better get some groans into our own praying and I don't detect much of that kind of praying anymore. We've got the happiness boys are all running the religion racket these days and it has become a show business and they're all got the heebie-jeebies the churches swung from rigor mortis to saint vitus and we've got into there and everybody's tra la la and you're supposed to laugh all the time and I believe in laughing and I use humor but my friend there's another side to this koan and if your heart has not been tuned to the agony if you don't have any the agony that your neighbors got right down the street or that folks all over town have gotten this world has got if you haven't got attuned to that something's wrong.

Jesus was climbing a hill of Calvary and over here was a crowd of women weeping groaning I'm sure and my lord on his way to die looked across and said don't cry for me weep for yourselves and for your children. I've been preaching sometimes for ladies meetings on that subject and some of them don't appreciate it and I can understand why. Jesus said you don't need to cry for me I don't need anybody

sobbing and sighing I'm going up this hill on purpose I'm not the victim of a mob I'm not going up there because I can't help myself.

He had stood in the garden and said I could call down 12 legions of angels if I wanted to a legion for every one of you disciples and he said the pilot you couldn't do a thing you don't have any power of yourself only the authority is given you. God I'm going up this hill to die for the world weep for yourselves you women and for your children and it's enough to cry about. Weep for America too young to die.

I wrote a foreword to my preacher friend that's got a book out on that subject it's a good book too America's too young to die. Joel said the preachers need to be weeping for revival between the at the altar weeping for revival but thank God it is from groans to glory we're on our way to a better world and while the groaning may be unutterable the bible says the joy is unspeakable that's two good urns isn't it?

Unutterable and you can't you can't put words to some some of you people here tonight I've faced people for 67 years in the ministry and I've learned a few things and one is that we have managed to hide our real problems pretty well with a church face on Sunday morning and a tough it out stiff upper lip philosophy maybe but there's a groan there and if we don't know what it is to be headed for glory I don't know how they do it I don't know how they stand it oh what a foretaste of glory divine our light affliction which is but for a moment you say mine's not light preacher why'd they say our light mine's pretty heavy but for a moment worketh for us a more exceeding and eternal weight of glory our redemption draweth nigh Jesus is coming back and he'll reign wherever the sun doth his

successive journeys run he's going to do that I don't know whether the planets will be in the heavenly arrangement or not maybe so we can go pretty fast now in space but then you can be anywhere your thought could take you I wouldn't be a bit surprised I believe in the redemption of creation some people don't seem to understand that that this present world God's not going to let the devil get away with the mess that he's made with our help out of this beautiful world he's going to fix it up pretty again I believe that with all my soul and I see nothing that forbids believing that I may have the privilege of walking with my beloved in the resurrection body in the new earth they redeemed it that's not the new heavens and the new earth no but the earth's going to be redeemed and the lion and

the lamb will lie down together and the lamb won't be on the inside of the lion either and all the saints will be given their resurrection bodies and we'll walk together and what a glorious time that'll be and God shall I'm glad it doesn't say he had the angels to do it God shall take care of this personally wipe all tears from our eyes can you fathom the almighty carrying enough for us to do that oh you say that's literal well if it's literal the reality is always better than the symbol I think that's pretty good myself things are passed away no more this no more that going to the land of no more it's great country and I think of that little boy who couldn't understand the song they sang in the revival so where is that place dad they're singing about some kind of a town called dynamo and

he said well I don't know I know about Baltimore but I never heard about dynamo they said they're all singing I'm going home to die no more well we are thank God we're all headed for dynamo that's a great place and it does not yet appear but we shall be every time I look in the looking glass that verse comes to mind nearly I said Lord you've got to improve on this I know I'm going to look better than this in the hereafter it does not yet appear some of you could say the same thing but I'm not going to embarrass you oh it's a great prospect but I wish you'd go home and take out that red pencil and make a big ring around Hebrew 65 every time we get in the sixth chapter of Hebrews everybody starts arguing about eternal

security well let's quit arguing about that whatever you believe about it

until rarely at least and put a ring around where it speaks of those who have tasted the powers of the age to come do you know what that means it means that you can taste a little bit of heaven now the trees bend over the wall the fruit now bless his mind okay of glory divine I was in Texas years ago in a conference where a dear Dr.

O'Brien one of the churches in another city was teaching the book of Job and I was preaching and I remember that one night I talked about this foretaste of glory and when we started to the hotel in his car we never said a word to each other forever so far and on all at once he just broke loose singing or marching design the verse that says the hill of Zion yields a thousand sacred sweets before we tread the heavenly fields or walk the golden street you know what that means you can taste some of it now so why don't you take in a little bit of heaven before you get there it's not going to get exhausted to supply over there enjoy a little of it now and while creation groans and we groan and the holy spirit groans we rejoice in that hope of glory when my dear one lay just a few days from

death uh seven years ago and uh I was here through that period and some of you were so gracious and wonderful to me she wrote she couldn't talk she had some kind of an instrument in her mouth to breathe with she couldn't breathe enough to get enough blood to her lungs to keep her going but she could scribble a little and only I could read it then but she wrote just this my future looks dark because it looked like at the best she could do would be a wheelchair patient the rest of her days but God spared her that in a few days my future looks dark I put that in my scrapbook on the left side and on the right side I sent a line that her dear mother who went on to heaven not long ago at 98 years of age and it said on that side that there's a precious birthday verse what looks dark in the

distance will brighten as we draw near so I get that out every once in a while my future looks dark on one side but what looks dark in the distance will brighten as we draw near it has for both of thank God because it's all light over there the Bible says in no night I don't never did like night I get up early in the morning try to push the rest of it out so the daylight is coming I just don't like night and over there they don't have any don't have any lighting system for the light of the lamb of God is the illumination system in that land that's great country over there my future looks dark no no she didn't know how near she was to the world of life and dear mother already at that age her mind didn't operate much anymore like it did but God put some of us to bed in the dark but he'll

get us all up in the morning and I'm sure that well I had a sermon that I preached a lot in those days on living in the great until the Bible has so much to say about that until and he which hath begun a good work will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ we're waiting until he that hindereth is taken out of the way judge nothing before the time until the Lord come until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled until the fullness of the Gentiles become in until he puts all things under his feet until he subdues all things unto himself sincere and without offense until the day of Jesus Christ hold fast what you have until he come showing forth his death until he come occupy till I come waiting until all his enemies be made his footstool did you ever read as many untills in all your life

the next time somebody wants to know what time it is tell them it's until well they may think you're got wheels in your head but you might get a word in there so that's where we are we're living in the great until and so when my dear one really neared the other side you left one other note I'm going through things I cannot tell you now until and stopped but has its world and the fact that we're going to glory makes it

bearable sometimes but you can't get this many people together without some dear people oh if we took time and yet so many times it's the kind of thing you can't get up and tell anyhow but there's a groan maybe it's lasted for years because of bereavement or some special sadness maybe you've got a physical condition that's causing you can concern you're dreading that day

when the doctor may have to look at you with that way that although he sort of halfway tries to hide it tells on itself or maybe it's financial maybe it's what's going to happen in the economy maybe it's trouble in the family maybe it's some young person I don't know what God wants me to do well my friend it speaks well for you if you've got a serious concern about it because you can't joke along the way of glory you can laugh and sing to the praise of God but while we make our way through remember there's somebody in this meeting tonight who did a lot of groaning down here and the Holy Spirit is even now praying for you with groaning that no words can express don't you think we'd better incorporate into our living a little more of that not pessimism not going around wanting to cry on

somebody's shoulder not that but the kind of just been talking about and there's a groan in your heart and in your life Jesus is here he said we're two or three together he's there we've heard it so much we Americans that it doesn't move us much anymore tell somebody on the mission field that finds out for the first time he can't sleep that night hmm never heard it we go to sleep listening to it in America but he's here and you could bow your head right back there for a closing prayer in a moment and just say Lord you know all about the groan but I can't carry my burdens alone but I roll them over on thee cast thy burden on the Lord and he'll sustain and that's where to turn it over to him and then leave it there take your burden of the Lord and leave it right here in this tabernacle with

him and go out and take his word for it because it works I want to bear testimony that at my age and I'll be 79 in October that although I've been lonely the last seven years these have been for some reason the most fruitful years of my life I'm sure he may have something in mind you don't know a thing in this world he's the best said give me a mountain I talk to young people I say I've got one advantage on you I've been young and old both and you've just been young that gives me the edge on it you see so but I'm so glad tonight that what will comfort my heart and has comforted your heart will comfort any heart if we remember that there's another G that I haven't got time to talk about but it takes care of all of it thou lead from grace to glory and it's grace that takes care of all the

groaning and all the glory God bless

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