

Romans Chapter 8 Part 2 - John Karmelich

Title "How our eternal future should affect us right now!"

It is wonderful to think, "Yes life is hard, but God promises great things for us who trust in Him for our salvation!" It's relatively easy to believe in something good that will occur after we die. The questions to ponder is, how do we know that is true? and what should we do now given we believe it is true? My goal by the end of this lesson is to answer both questions.

First how many of you go through periods of doubts that Christianity is true? Congratulations, you are normal! Even some of the greatest Christian thinkers go through their periods of doubts and of course I do as well! I can always think back to the miracles I have witnessed in my life as reassurance. Even if you never had such miracles to recall, let me share one of my favorite study tricks. In the back of most bibles is a set of maps. That helps us to remember that word as an acronym: The letter M stands for the manuscripts. We have thousands of manuscript fragments and full copies of both the Old and the New Testaments going back many centuries. In Hebrew and Greek, the first letter of their alphabet equals 1, the second 2, etc. To make sure a copy is accurate, copyists would add the numerical value of a page to make sure it matched the copy. There are thousands of sermon manuscripts from the first few centuries around today from people who quote the bible. Of course there are spelling errors. By looking at all of those thousands of copies it's pretty easy to figure out the original text!

The letter A in MAPS represents archelogy. I joke that the biggest economy builder in Israel is tourism with archelogy being a close second. Just saying there is physical evidence to support the bible all over the Middle East. Then we have P in MAPS, which represents prophecy. About 30% of the bible gives future predictions long after the writer died. Jesus himself described the armies surrounding Jerusalem about 40 years before the Romans destroyed it! The historian Josephus who witnessed that destruction, described Christians who found a spot where the Roman army surrounding Jerusalem wasn't, a hole in their defense! It means they escaped that slaughter and remembered Jesus' words about that. My point is we get lots of biblical references to describe history before it occurred. Finally, the S in MAPS is for the biblical statistical evidence that it's the word of God! The promised Messiah (as stated in 2 Samuel 7:14) had to be from a descendant of King David. In 70AD, Rome destroyed the Jewish temple, where all family records were stored. That means no Jewish man born after that could claim or prove he's the Messiah. In two of the Gospels, we have Jesus' ancestry line tied to King David. Of course, dozens of other facts also support that! My point is if we're going to trust the Bible in its promises for our eternal destiny there is great evidence there to trust the Bible in the first place!

OK then, all of that leads me to Romans 8:18 to end of the chapter! I gave that long intro as most of us go through our periods of doubts about eternal life. The text here in Romans mostly focuses on what is our eternal future, so I had to get all of that out of my system before I begin here! Paul opens by saying that creation (i.e., the earth) is waiting for this event! I admit the idea of rocks and plants waiting to see Jesus' return confused me. Then I remembered something: when God punished Adam for sinning, God didn't strike Adam dead or say break his bones. Instead, God cursed the ground that Adam had to work to survive (Genesis 3:17). The point is when Jesus returns to rule the world, that curse ends! Then our world will return to how existed before the curse came! So, in that sense the world wants His return!

All that leads to our hope: We're betting our lives, willing to suffer to live as Jesus demands all because we believe in a better life after He returns! That's why I got so obsessed about describing ways we can have assurance about His return! In other words, if I can trust the Bible with what's the best way to live

now, I can equally trust in God's promises of what the world will be like when Jesus returns! Paul does a pretty intense job of "pounding the pulpit" that we hope in things we can't see in Verses 24-25!

That leads to another problem: How do we handle our weaknesses? A classic joke goes, "Lead me not into temptation I can find it all by myself!" In other words, as Paul pounded the point leading up to this section, without the help of the Holy Spirit, we can never live as God wants us to live. That's why once we accept the Gospel Message the Spirit in effect takes up residence inside of us! But we still sin even with that fact! True! I describe the Holy Spirit as a gentleman, in that if we don't want His help then He will let us do what we want! It's part of free will, that at any moment as a believer we can choose to be a witness for God or walk away from His desire for our lives! Does that mean when I'm tempted to sin, all I must do is pray for guidance and it goes away? Of course not! When we focus on pleasing God it is harder to sin! Bottom line the Holy Spirit helps us. We can ask Him what to pray for or ask Him to guide our lives for God's glory! There's nothing God wants more than total surrender of our will to His. I'm not saying we'll be perfect, but we're more likely to live how God desires when we focus on Him.

All of that leads to one of my favorite verses in the bible: "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." (NKJV.) I did memorize it long ago! It doesn't mean if we're doing God's will, everything will go great for us. It is a simple reminder that God will use the lives of all believers for His glory! Paul then uses that verse as a springboard to describe the benefits of being a Christian. Remember from our standpoint we became a believer is when we first believed. Since God is perfect by definition, He knows all things, as God does exist outside of time (which He created). My point is simply that God knows who will be saved but He doesn't share that with us so we can witness to all people! All of that leads to Verse 30. Those that He called, He justified (treats us as if we never sin) and He glorifies us in the sense that after we die, we'll get every benefit Jesus gets! Bottom line, all the suffering of being a Christian is worth it! Remember Paul is preaching to Christians he never met, so he lays all of this out in detail.

I refer to Verses 31 to 35 as the "Why worry" section? If God justifies us (treats us as if we never sin), then why worry about how we act? Yes, we should avoid sin as it should be our desire to please God as a sign of gratitude not obligation! Verse 35 describes all sorts of horrible things and says in effect none of those things can separate us from the things God promised us. So, can God "change His mind"? The next three chapters in effect answer that question: Let's be honest, Israel as a nation has blown it so bad that they were kicked out of that land on more than one occasion! In spite of that, God made a promise that the nation will be saved one day in the future, not because they deserve it but simply because He is not capable (by definition) of going back on His unconditional promises to them or us!

Verses 37 to 39 read like a benediction. The main reason Paul didn't end the letter at this point, among other reasons is He wants to use the next 3 chapters to prove His unconditional promises are without a doubt: unconditional! The idea of this benediction is to realize that we can trust in His eternal promise to us of eternal life with incredible eternal benefits and that's FAR greater than all the suffering that we can possibly endure in this lifetime!

OK, that leads me back to my two opening questions. The first one was "how do we know all of this is true?" Despite the doubts we go through, the Bible is full of proof that it is God's Word and came to us outside of time as we know it! The fact the bible's full of predictions that have come true is only one of the ways we know it's the word of God. That's why I spent time on "MAPS" to start this lesson!

The second question was, "What should we be doing now given that's true about our future?" It doesn't mean we have to be an expert on say bible prophesy. It does mean God saved us with a purpose. That

is to use our lives to make a difference for Him, to be a witness for Him, and help build up believers to also be a good witness for Him. It doesn't mean we all have to quit our jobs to be professional priests. I would argue it's a matter of praying for guidance as to what God desires for each of us and using all the gifts (talents) we have, to make a difference as well as being practical to help grow the church!

With that said, hope you like this study. I wrote a more detailed one some years back. If you want to read that one, click on one of the links below. It is still a joy to study this stuff, and again I'm grateful for all of you reading this. If you're new here, you're always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks again for reading this!

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