

Life With a Future

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[0 : 00] Now, we're continuing our study in Romans today. We've been working through this great book over the past few months. And we're going to look together at the section that Louise read for us in chapter 8.

We're going to go through it together and we'll be looking at various slides as we go, just a wee note on the slides. And one or two people had requested access to the slides that we look at, so they're going to go out on the Wednesday email.

So if you do want to see the slides, you don't need to worry about taking a picture of them because you'll get access to them in the Wednesday email. And so that's a good means of getting a copy of them if you wish.

Although there's not that many today, so it's not the best day to make that announcement. Romans 8, as you know, is an amazing chapter. It's describing for us the astonishing blessings that are ours through union with Christ.

Romans is this great book where Paul works through this wonderful argument. He starts at the beginning explaining the problem of sin, and then he describes beautifully and persuasively how God has addressed that problem.

[1 : 05] We are justified through faith in Jesus Christ, and from that justification, there are many, many blessings that flow out into our experience. And chapter 8 of Romans is the great summary of these blessings.

It speaks about our freedom in Christ, so at the beginning it told us that there's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Paul then goes on to speak about our adoption in Christ.

We are adopted as sons, and by the spirit dwelling in us, we cry out, Abba, Father. Then we come to the section that we're going to look at together today from verse 18 to verse 30, which talks about our future in Christ.

And when we think about our future as Christians, and there's one key word, one key theological word that sums it all up and that lies at the heart of what our future holds.

Do you know what that word is? Well, it was the very last word that Louise read. It's the word glory, or glorification.

[2 : 13] Those who be predestined, he also called, and those who be called, he also justified.

Those who be justified, he also glorified. And I want us to really take that one word, glorified, which is pointing us to the doctrine of glorification, and think about that together, because that's really in many ways the word that sums up what this section is all about.

I have to acknowledge that this is one of the richest sections in the whole of the New Testament, and so we're only going to be scratching the surface in many ways. All we ever do with God's word is scratch the surface.

But we'll look at it and we'll see what we can discover about this great doctrine of glorification. And to do it, we're going to have five headings. They're very, very simple. Our five headings are four and a half questions, if you like.

What is it? Who does it? Why is it needed? How does it happen? And now, what are the implications? So the last one's not really a question, so that's why we say four and a half questions. What, who, why, how, and now. So number one, glorification, what is it? Well, it's very simply, it is the final goal of God's great plan of redemption.

[3 : 23] If you look at that verse there, it's setting out before us four steps. It's got predestined, called, justified, glorified.

These steps are part of what we call the order of salvation, which is a great list of things that fit together in terms of God's saving work through Jesus Christ on the cross.

These things all fit together in a beautiful order. At the end is glorification. It is the final step. Now you're probably thinking, well, Thomas, how come it's the final, if it's the final step, how come it's in the past tense before you're there on the screen?

Well, the fact that it's in the past tense in verse 30 there in English does not mean that it has already happened, because in the Greek language that the New Testament was originally written in, the tense that's been used there is not really talking so much about time.

I remember once listening to a lecture and he said that when you're thinking about a tense in Greek, he says, time is tiny.

[4 : 29] It's a tiny thing. It's not really what they're thinking about in terms of using tenses like we do in English. What it's talking about is the fact that this should be viewed as a whole, complete action.

So that's the priority in terms of the grammar, if you like. And so although we translated it in the past, what we should be really thinking is just the fact that this has to be viewed as a whole.

In other words, that it's absolutely certain that this is going to take place. Glorification is wholly, fully, and perfectly guaranteed through our union with Jesus Christ.

And so when God initiated the plan of redemption, as you have there with predestination and with all that he began in initiating this process, he did it with a goal in mind.

And that goal is glorification. And so it's a future event. And if you look at that verse there, you can see that it's unique in that sense. When we were predestined, that's in the past. When we're called as Christians, that's in the past, justifying.

[5 : 32] Being justified, that's a key event in our past if we're a Christian. But to be glorified is a future event. It lies ahead of us.

And so that immediately raises the question, well, if it's a future event, when does it happen? When does glorification take place? Well, it's probably quite easy to think to yourself, well, that happens when we die.

And we often say when somebody dies, we speak about them going to glory. But that's not completely correct, because glorification will not take place when we die.

It will take place when Christ returns. And that distinction is brought out very well for us in the shorter catechism. The shorter catechism is just a list of questions and answers to big questions from the Bible.

It was written many, many, many years ago, but it's still very, very useful. If you don't have it, it's very easy to get on your phone. You can get an app, just type it in, type in shorter catechism and you'll find an app with it on it.

[6 : 38] Although it's written in old fashioned language, it's still really, really useful and really helpful because it just basically gives straightforward answers to big theological questions.

And there's two questions here, questions 37 and 38, which bring to us a very important distinction. So I'll just read them out and you can follow them on the screen. Question 37, what benefits do believers receive from Christ at death?

The souls of believers are at their death, are made perfect in holiness and do immediately pass into glory and their bodies being still united in Christ to rest in their graves till the resurrection.

Question 38, what benefits do believers receive from Christ at the resurrection? Answer, at the resurrection, believers being raised up in glory shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity.

So the difference is really important. Question 37 refers to what happens when we die. And that is an amazing prospect, as Paul says, it's far better to depart and be with Christ, but that's still an intermediate state because though our souls pass into glory, our bodies remain in the grave waiting for something more to come.

[7 : 58] And the reason it's waiting is because more is to come. In fact, the best is yet to come. And that's what question 38 refers to, the fact that we will be fully glorified, body and soul reunited together where we will enjoy God for all eternity.

And that glorification is going to happen at the return of Christ. So when you're thinking glorification, you're not just thinking death, you're thinking the second coming and the resurrection.

And it's summed up very well by a great theologian who's much better at explaining things than I am, John Murray. He was a Scottish theologian who spent most of his working life in America in the 20th century.

And he says, glorification is the complete and final redemption of the whole person when in the integrity of body and spirit, the people of God will be conformed to the image of the risen, exalted and glorified Redeemer.

So glorification, what is it? That's what it is. Question number two, who is involved in this? Well, I suppose there's two questions to ask under this heading. We just asked, first of all, who makes the glorification happen?

[9 : 09] And then who is it who's glorified? So who makes it happen? Who receives it? And the answer to the first question is God. God is the one who makes it happen with virtually every element of God's plan of redemption.

He is active and we are passive. He takes the initiative. He performs the action. He does what is necessary. We see that in Romans 8.30, it says, whom he predestined, he called, he justified, he glorified.

God does it. In verse 17, you can see that we are glorified, that's passive, something that happens to us. We will be glorified by him.

So God is active, we are passive, we await Christ's return, and he will come again and bring about this decisive final work of glorification.

So if God does it, who is it who gets glorified? And I suppose you would think the answer is simple, that it's just us and that's true in a sense, God acts and we benefit.

[10 : 15] But there's more to it than that because our glorification is utterly bound up with someone else because you can see that in verse 17, we are glorified with him, with Jesus.

So our glorification is bound up with the glorification of Jesus Christ himself. Colossians 3.4 says the same thing, when Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. So when Christ returns, he will return in glory, and we are going to share in that glory if we are Christians because we are united to him.

And so when we are glorified, it's not because of any glory in ourselves, it's not about us working our way up and becoming really good and really impressive. We are simply glorified because we are united to Jesus, we are fellow heirs with him, and by his grace we are made to share his glory. So who is it? Well, God does it, we receive it, but only through our union with Jesus Christ.

Question number three, why is this necessary? Why does God want this to happen?

[11 : 35] Well, as we said at the start, glorification is the final goal of God's plan of salvation. So if you're going to ask yourself the question, what's Christianity all about? What's the whole point in the Bible?

What's God's objective in it all? The answer is glorification. That's his ultimate goal. And the reason why I think it's the final goal is because it is only at glorification, only at this end moment when we will finally see the complete and full reversal of everything that has gone wrong with humanity and with creation.

This is where we will see the curse that came with the fall being undone. And that's the final perfect reversal of the curse.

Because if you go all the way back to the beginning of the Bible, to Genesis chapter three, you'll see that when humanity sinned against God, the result of that was a curse.

And so the Lord said to the serpent, you are cursed. And then later on he said to Adam, cursed is the ground because of you. And in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life thorns and this is the chubbring forth for you shall eat the plants, the field by the sweat of your face.

[12 : 58] You shall eat bread till you return to the ground for out of it you are taken for your dust and to dust you shall return. So at the very beginning Adam and Eve sinned against God and the result of that is a curse.

And that curse affects all of creation. That's one of the first things that the Bible tells us. But if you go all the way to the end of the Bible, to the very end of the book of Revelation, you'll see an amazing description of restoration.

And it's really interesting when you go to Revelation and the very end it returns to the language of a garden. So it's really interesting to read the first two chapters of the Bible and read the last two chapters of the Bible.

First two describe a garden, you can go home this afternoon and see what the last two chapters describe. God is going to restore everything.

And a really important phrase appears in Revelation chapter 22. It says, no longer will there be anything accursed.

[14:10] And so glorification is going to undo that curse. And that's why ultimately glorification is linked to the resurrection where the great consequence of the curse, death, is going to be destroyed.

Paul speaks about that in his great resurrection chapter in 1 Corinthians 15 where he speaks about the perishable putting on the imperishable, the mortal putting on immortality and then shall come to pass the saying that is written.

Death is swallowed up in victory. So God's big purpose is to undo the damage of the fall and that is only going to fully happen at glorification.

And all of that raises the question, how does it happen? What is going to be accomplished when Christ returns? So we thought about what? We thought about who?

We thought about why? But we need to spend a wee bit of time thinking about how. Now I want us to just focus on four things to see how all of this fits together, the beginning of the Bible and the end goal of glorification.

[15:20] Glorification is going to deal with the problems that arose as a result of that curse. So you can see here the curse brought various consequences.

There's four of them there set out before you. For death, and so we saw that when you read through chapter 3, God says to Adam, chapter 2, that was the warning, if you eat of the fruit, you shall surely die.

Humanity was supposed to bear the image of God. That was the great role of humanity, but the curse broke that and humanity no longer bore the image in the way that it should.

Creation itself, as we read, was cursed, thorns and thistles came forth, working the ground, became a trial. The relationship between God and humanity was broken.

There was alienation and hostility. And at glorification, each of these things, as you can see, is going to be dealt with by an aspect of what Jesus' return is going to accomplish.

[16:25] The first of these is resurrection. When Christ returns, the dead will be raised. So it says back in 1 Corinthians 15 and 52, in a moment in the twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet, the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable.

The power of death will be broken because death is the separation of body and soul. That's what death basically is. And at the resurrection, body and soul are going to be reunited.

And not only that, the frailties and weaknesses and limitations of our bodies are no longer going to spoil our worship and service of God. So the blind will see, the lame will walk, the deaf shall hear.

That's why all the miracle works of Jesus were pointing us towards this final restoration work that He's come to accomplish. As we read, the perishable body will put on the imperishable, the mortal body will put on immortality.

In all of these things, the curse is being undone. The death that came through that curse is going to be destroyed forever.

[17:30] And Paul speaks about this in Romans 8 because he describes how our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that this is going to bring.

God is going to bring an amazing hope of life through the resurrection. But alongside that resurrection, there's going to be transformation as well.

Not only are we going to be resurrected, body and soul, we're not going to be just brought back to the status and condition that we have here on earth, but something greater is going to happen. As verse 29 of Romans 8 says, we're predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.

And that same truth is expressed in Philippians 3 where it says, our citizenship is in heaven and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself.

So, at the resurrection, bodies raised, reunited with souls, but not to the same condition that we had here, brought to a transformed level where we will be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

[18:53] And again, this is undoing the damage of the fall, because if you can see it all fits together so beautifully. We were made to bear the image of God. We sinned and broke that image. We are saved.

We are being restored. At glorification, we're going to bear that image again. We're going to be conformed to the image of the Son, brought back to everything that we were once meant to be.

Paul says, and again in 1 Corinthians 15, just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

We're going to be made like our elder brother, Jesus Christ. The third thing that's going to happen at glorification is that there's going to be a regeneration.

Now, when I say regeneration, I'm not referring to being born again as a new, when we're given a new heart as part of our saving process as a different thing. What we're talking about here is the renewal of creation.

[19 : 53] Jesus spoke about this himself. In Matthew 19, he says, truly I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit in this glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on 12 thrones.

When he says, in the new world, the word he literally uses there is regeneration, in the regeneration. Creation is going to be remade, which is why the Bible often describes this realm as a new heavens and a new earth.

The old heavens and the old earth are going to be restored to a new heaven and a new earth. At glorification, creation is going to be restored.

You'll see again that the curse is being undone. The curse broke creation. It became a place of hostility, of suffering, of toil, of thorns, of thistles, and of pain.

All of that is going to be undone. At glorification, the ground, the creation is going to be renewed.

[21 : 03] Paul tells us something amazing in Romans 8. He tells us that creation is longing for that to happen.

From verse 19, he says, the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God, for the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God, for we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

We can see the evidence of that all around us. Creation is groaning under a curse, but at glorification, the earth will be made new and the curse will be utterly undone.

And then the fourth thing that's going to take place is that God's family is going to be complete. And that's the amazing balance that you have in Romans 8, because here you have Paul talking about future glory, but at the same time, he talks about us being adopted into God's family.

We are God's children through faith in Jesus Christ. We are his family. We are joint heirs with Christ. He is our older brother. So in other words, our glorification will involve us entering into the fullness of God's family and the alienation of the curse is going to be undone.

[22 : 37] We and the creation with us are eagerly, eagerly waiting for the time when we will be perfectly and completely in God's family. And that curse, which separated us from God and which broke human relationships, is going to be undone.

In the new heavens and in the new earth, as Revelation 22 tells us, the dwelling place of God is with people, with his family.

And this raises a really, really important point in regard to glorification. When we think about all the steps of God's saving work, we think about election and we think about being called and we think about being justified and sanctified and all these various steps.

And these are all in many ways quite individual. And so you'll often hear, maybe preachers like me telling people that you need to put your faith in Jesus Christ as an individual.

No one else can do it for you. You have to do it. That's true. When we talk about justification, we talk about your sins being counted as righteous, your debt being canceled.

[23 : 54] When we talk about you being redeemed, it's your freedom from slavery that's been accomplished. So it's very, in many ways, personal and individual, which is very, very important because nobody can believe for us.

Nobody can be justified for us. We as individuals have to have that personal relationship with Jesus Christ. However, although that personalness is really, really, really, really important, I want us to make sure that we notice that glorification is different because glorification is something that we as Christians will experience together.

We will all pass away at different points. So question 37 is something that's going to happen to different people at different times.

But question 38 is not an individual experience. It's a shared collective event. It's something that's going to happen together.

Paul talks about that. He says, the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, with the sound of the trumpet, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

[25 : 23] And so we will always be with the Lord. And that's really important. The final goal of God's redemptive plan in your life and in my life is not an individual event.

It is an event for the people of God together. So God's great goal, His whole plan is not to create glorified individuals. It's to create a glorified people, a family, a church, a covenant community. And so while, yes, we need to emphasize the need for personal individual faith in Jesus, we must remember that that's a means to a collective end. It's leading us to the point where we will all be part of God's collective people.

And that, of course, makes perfect sense because if we are united to Jesus Christ, it means we are also united to each other. If we are adopted as God's children, it means we are also brothers and sisters.

All the various steps in God's great plan of salvation are preparing us for a collective glorification when Christ returns.

[26 : 37] And that should not surprise us at all because Jesus' prayer in John 17 was that we may be one just as you, Father, and me, and I in you, that they may also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me, the glory that you've given me, I have given to them that they may be one even as we are one.

Ultimately, Christianity is not about you or me. It's about us.

Glorification is something that we will share in together. So what is it? It's the end goal. Who does it? Who does it?

We receive it in our union with Christ. Why is it necessary? It's to undo the curse. How is it going to happen? It's going to deal with all the specific things that the curse damaged in God's plan.

Now, what are the implications of this for us? Well, I want to just say four things very, very briefly. Number one, glorification reminds us that we should all be thinking about our future as Christians.

[27 : 54] And that sounds so simple, and yet it's something that we tend not to do. How often do we go through each day thinking about glorification, thinking about the future that God holds for us?

But we've been reminded here that it's something that should fill our minds and that we should meditate upon as much as we can. And it should also remind us that this world is temporary.

So for that reason, we should have a loose grip on this world and a firm grip on the world to come. And that will help us when we face trouble and sorrow and hardship and disappointment.

And it will also keep us from unnecessary sorrow because sometimes we can hold on to things that are temporarily too much. We can hold on to our possessions or our status or our position, even though we know that these things are always going to be passing away.

It gives us a far better perspective on life if we think about our future. Number two, glorification means that we should be thinking about each other.

[29 : 03] If the goal of salvation has togetherness at its center, which it does, then that should shape the way we live our lives as Christians together now.

And so that's one of the amazing things about being a Christian. The fact that this world is temporary means that we should have a loose grip on stuff.

So your possessions, your house, your wage, all of these things are ultimately going to pass away. We're not going to be able to take any of these things with us and we should keep a loose grip on these things.

Do you know that as a Christian, there is something that you can hold on to really, really, really tightly?

And that's each other. As Christians, we can hold on to each other so tightly because we are together now and we're going to be together then.

[30 : 08] And having your brother or sister in Christ beside you now means that you're getting a glimpse of what glorification is going to be like because the bonds that we share together now as a community in this church and as part of the wider church of Jesus Christ across this country and across the world, these bonds are the seeds of an eternal family.

So you can look at your fellow Christian. You can look at your Christian husband, your Christian wife, your Christian friend, your Christian parent and you can say, I'm really looking forward to glorification with you.

And you can also think of your brothers and sisters who are no longer with you. And you can look forward to sharing glorification with them as well.

So we should be thinking about each other. We should also be thinking about the new heavens and the new earth. Now I want you just for a minute to think about every way in which the curse mucks up your life.

So you think about the curse back in Genesis where our relationship with God was broken, where our relationship with other people was broken, where our relationship with ourselves was broken and where our relationship to our physical bodies and our physical environment was broken.

[31 : 39] Think about all the ways in which that wrecks your life now. So you can think about physical pain that I'm sure many of you live with every day.

You can think about weakness, maybe either in temperament or in terms of coping with things. You can think about illness that you or loved ones may be suffering.

You can think about the worries that you have. You can think about the failings that have hurt you or hurt others in life even as Christians.

All of these things are the result of the curse, but there is no curse in glorification.

Nothing. Nothing. That's why God will be able to wipe away every tear in your eye.

[32 : 45] There will be no more pain, no more sorrow. The former things will pass away.

So we should be thinking about our future. We should be thinking about each other. We should be thinking about the new heavens and the new earth, but most of all we should be thinking about our father and our brother because glorification is going to bring a perfect relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

We read Paul say in Thessalonians, we will always be with the Lord. And that's God's goal.

That's what God wants, that you will be with him. And the whole of the theology that Paul has described from Romans 1 through to the end of Romans 7 is working together to make that possible because God's great goal is glorification and at the heart of that is the fact that we will be with him and God will have his precious children with him.

When Adam sinned against God and they disobeyed his instruction, do you know what the first thing God said was?

[34 : 18] He said, where are you? In glorification, God will never have to say where are you again because we will be with him forever and ever.

The curse is utterly undone and we will dwell in God's house forevermore.

If you're a Christian, you have an amazing future and we share in that future together. But if you're not yet a Christian or you're not sure, then please, please, please know that you can be part of this too.

And God wants you to share in this as well. And God has brought you here today to hold out that offer before you and to say, I want you to share in that as well.

And you really have to ask yourself whether pushing that away could ever be worth it.

[35 : 43] Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the fullness of your saving work in Jesus Christ.

And we thank you for the amazing future that lies ahead of all who trust in Jesus.

And we acknowledge and we recognize that you're doing far, far, far, far more than we could ever deserve or ever be worthy of.

But it just shows us again what an amazingly gracious and kind God you are. We pray that our minds would be filled with the thought of our future in Jesus Christ.

And we pray for every single one of us that we would all trust in Jesus and that that future would be our future for each one of us.

[36 : 51] Amen. Amen. Amen.