Romans 8: Beyond Redemption…
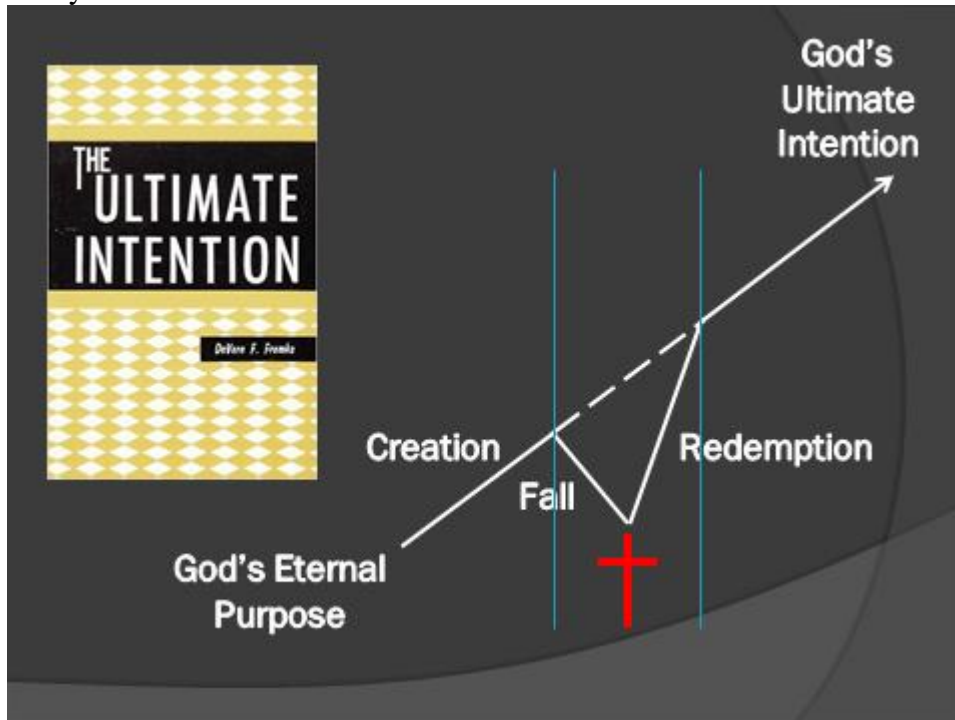
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Readings: Rom.7:24-8:2, 14-30
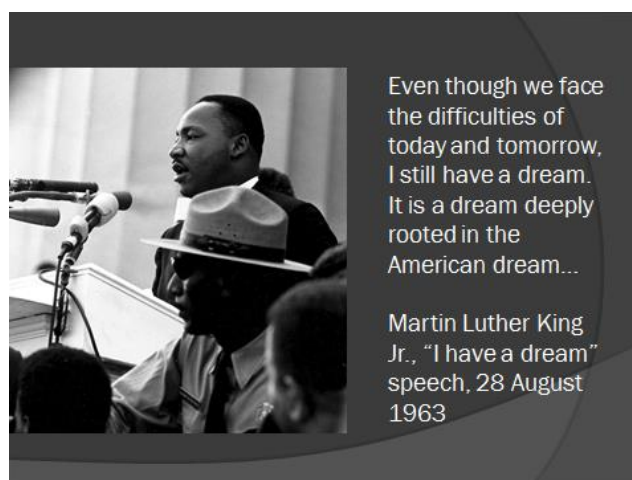
2 preliminary comments:

Approach modelled on DeVern Fromke's book *The Ultimate Intention* (popular among "deeper life"/Pentecostal/ Charismatic circles in 1960s)

Tendency to restrict God's purpose to our redemption from the effects of the Fall

But wider framework – God has an **eternal purpose**, an **ultimate intention**

Romans 8 = one of the great NT passages: Compare with Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech

- o "I have a dream" = **extemporaneous section** (not on King's speaking notes)
- o King caught up in inspiration of the moment: "his words flowed from some higher place…. Heaven itself opened up." (Corretta Scott King, *My Life with Martin Luther King, Jnr.*)
- o In Rom.8, **Paul is similarly caught up in the spirit of God's dream** (His "ultimate intention")

Starting point: v.14 "Those who are **led** by the Spirit of God are sons of God"
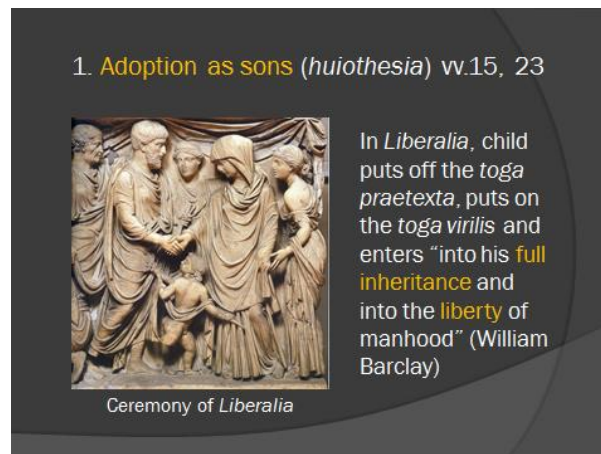
Ending point: vv.28-29 God's eternal purpose/ultimate intention
- v.28 "called according to his purpose"
- v.29a "predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son"
- v.29b "that he might be the firstborn among many brothers"

3 Aspects in Romans 8

1. Adoption as sons (vv.15, 23)
v.15 You received the spirit of Sonship (*huiothesia* = adoption as sons – ambiguous term)

1. Adoption as sons (*huiothesia*) vv.15, 23

In *Liberalia*, child puts off the *toga praetexta*, puts on the *toga virilis* and enters "into his full inheritance and into the liberty of manhood" (William Barclay)

Ceremony of *Liberalia*

When are we adopted?

- Rom.8:15 infers a past act ("you **have received** the Spirit of adoption…") – also Gal.4:5 and Eph.1:5
- But Rom.8:23 implies that it hasn't yet happened ("we **wait eagerly** [lit. looking with head outstretched, standing on tiptoe] for our adoption…")

Adoption in Roman world not quite the same as present-day adoption – 2 aspects:
- Adoption of slave or member of another family into new family (Barclay, *Romans*, pp.109-112)
- Ceremony of *Liberalia* (17 March each year), when child (14-17 years old) legally becomes a man – takes off *toga praetexta* (purple band at foot of robe) and puts on *toga virilis* (plain toga) – then conducted down to forum and formally introduced into public life = "entered into his **full inheritance** and into the **liberty** of manhood" (Barclay, *Galatians*, p.37).

This second meaning implicit in word *huiothesia*:

- *Huios* = "son" – pre-eminently used of Jesus, the Son of God
- v.17 Co-heirs with Christ
- v.22 Glorious liberty of the children of God
- v.29 Predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers

2. Liberation of Creation (vv.19-23)

v.21 Creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God

- Mark 16:15 – Gospel preached to "all creation" (cp.Col.1:23)
- 2 Cor.5:17 – Personal regeneration ("if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation"; see also Gal.6:11)
- Rom.8 extends this far beyond "personal salvation" to include the redemption of the whole creation:

- o v.19 Creation standing on tip-toes waiting for sons of God to be revealed
- o v.20 Creation subject to frustration (*metaiotēs* = emptiness, futility)
- o v.21 Creation in bondage to decay/corruption (1 Cor.15:42 mortality; 2 Pet.1:4 moral corruption)
- o v.22 Creation groaning as in pains of childbirth (something is coming!)
- All of creation is **damaged** and **subject to futility** (= fall of Adam or fall of Lucifer?):
  - o **Astronomical**:
    - ✓ Craters on almost all solid bodies in solar system (Mercury to Pluto)
    - ✓ Miranda – broken moon (vertical cliffs 5km high at join)
    - ✓ Supernovae Crab nebula (exploded 1054)
    - ✓ Colliding galaxies (Stephan's Quintet – discovered 1877)

  - o **Corruption in nature**:
    - ✓ Decay (fruit detached from source of life, i.e. stem)

> Poem:
>
> …I've got used to my arthritis
> To my dentures I'm resigned
> I can manage my bifocals
> But, Oh God; I miss my mind!
>
> Sometimes I can't remember
> When I stand upon the stair
> If I am going up for something
> Or have I just come down from there?
>
> Before the fridge so often
> My mind is filled with doubt
> Now have I put some food away
> Or have I come to take it out?
>
> Sometimes when it is night time
> With my night cap on my head
> I don't know if I'm retiring
> Or if I've just got out of bed….

- ✓ Pollution
- ✓ Global warming = "anthropocene era" (earth changing geologically through the impact of humans (Elizabeth Kolbert, "The Anthropocene Debate: Marking Humanity's Impact", Environment 360: Reporting, Analysis, Opinion and Debate website, 17 May 2010 http://e360.yale.edu/feature/the_anthropocene_debate__marking_humanitys_impact/2274/)

  Moral corruption
- ✓ Porn and alcohol
- ✓ Kickbacks to the wealthy // social neglect of poor
- ✓ Quote from American sociologist E. Digby Baitzell:

> The downfall of every civilization comes, not from the moral corruption of the common man, but rather from the moral complacency of common men in high places.

3. The firstfruits of the Spirit (v.23)

v.23 We ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit… (also James 1:18 "that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all that he created")

Firstfruits = liturgical term (firstfruits of coming harvest, offered to God [Lev.23:9-10ff; Deut 26:10; Prov.3:9])

What things does the Spirit produce as these fruitfruits?

- v.12 Spirit sets free
- v.14 Spirit leads into mature sonship
- v.15 Spirit makes us sons of God
- v.16 Spirit testifies that we are God's children
- v.26 Spirit helps our weaknesses
- v.26 Spirit intercedes for us
- v.26 Spirit intercedes to fulfil God's will

The Spirit is the **active agent** of God's ultimate purpose, bringing us into what we are called to be (we haven't yet entered the fullness of the harvest, but we are/have "firstfruits" now)

Church is called to be the firstfruits "**sample community**" of the coming harvest…

Conclusion:

- All of creation is **groaning** in childbirth until now (v.22) – waiting to be delivered into glorious liberty of children of God (v.19)
- We ourselves **groan** inwardly, waiting for the adoption as sons (v.23)
- The Spirit himself **groans**, interceding for us with groans which words cannot express (v.26)

Finish with Lord's Prayer – "thy kingdom come…"