

Keener Romans Session10 Podcast

Wow, you really sent over some intense material for our deep dive this time. Yeah, this is Romans 8.23 through 9.16 with Dr. Craig Keener. Ooh, Dr. Keener, okay.

As our guide, yeah. I'm so ready to like just get into all of his insights on suffering and God's love and this whole new Exodus concept for believers. Yeah, Dr. Keener is really good at kind of weaving together the historical context with biblical interpretation, so get ready.

Okay, so he starts by connecting the groaning in Romans 8 with the suffering of the Israelites in Exodus. Yeah, it's like Paul is painting this picture of a new Exodus for us as believers, right? Mirroring Israel's liberation with our own spiritual journey. Yeah, okay.

It's really cool. So it's not just like a surface level parallel. No, not at all.

Okay. He really argues that just as God heard the Israelites cries, he hears our groans as we await the full redemption of our bodies. Wow.

It's this already but not yet tension. That was a huge theme for the early church. And speaking of the early church, he brought up this really interesting detail about how they used the imagery of the two goats in Leviticus 16.

Oh. I honestly needed a refresher on that whole ritual. Yeah, so that's from the Day of Atonement.

One goat was sacrificed, symbolizing the removal of sin. Right. While the other goat, the scapegoat, was sent into the wilderness, carrying the sins of the people away.

Okay. And so the early church fathers saw these two goats as foreshadowing the two comings of Christ. The first coming to deal with sin.

Okay. And the second coming for complete liberation. So just like Israel had that in-between time in the wilderness.

Yes. We have this period where we've experienced salvation. Right.

But we're still waiting for its full realization in our lives and the world around us. Exactly. And that leads us to the idea of the first fruits of the spirit.

Okay. Which Keener says isn't just a promise, but the actual beginning of our spiritual harvest. This has powerful implications for how we live as Christians.

So what do you make of his point that the world should be able to glimpse heaven by observing the love and unity within the Christian community? It's a call to action. Okay. It's not just about our individual relationship with God, but it's about how our transformed lives impact the world around us.

Right. It's about embodying the reality of God's kingdom here and now. That's a challenging but inspiring thought.

Yeah. He used this example of Christ's resurrection as the first fruits of the general resurrection. It clicked for me that just as Jesus's resurrection guarantees our future resurrection, the spirit we experience now is a foretaste of the glory that awaits us.

Yeah. And that ties beautifully into Romans 8.28. Okay. Where Paul says, God works all things for good.

Yes. For those who are called according to his purpose. That verse has always been a source of comfort and confusion for me.

What exactly did Keener say about that? It's not about everything magically working out in this life. It's about God working things for good in light of his ultimate plan and our ultimate good, which is glorification. Okay.

And this connects to the concept of suffering. Right. Because God can use even our hardest trials to shape us into the image of Christ.

Yeah. That's a much bigger perspective than just expecting things to always go smoothly. Yeah.

Does this idea of suffering play into his interpretation of the new exodus as well? Absolutely. Keener reminds us that we can better comfort others in the brokenness because we've experienced God's comfort in ours. Right.

It reframes suffering, not just as something to endure, but as a potential source of strength and empathy. Wow. That's a profound takeaway.

Yeah. I have to admit, I'm a little apprehensive about where we go from here. Okay.

We're heading into the thorny theological territory of predestination in Romans 8.29-30. Oh, yeah. I'm bracing myself for a heady debate. You might be surprised.

Really? Keener actually steers clear of the usual Calvinist versus Armenian debates. How does he handle that? He focuses on the points where most Christians agree. Okay, such as God drawing us to himself, salvation being by grace, not merit, and the importance of persevering in our faith.

Okay. He doesn't shy away from the complexity of the issue, though. So what does he actually say about predestination? He offers a perspective that I found incredibly thought-provoking.

Yeah. He suggests that God's sovereignty might actually encompass human free will. I'm intrigued.

Yeah. What does he mean by that? Is he saying we have free will or not? It's more nuanced than a simple yes or no. Okay.

He's challenging us to consider that God might be smarter than our limited theological systems. Okay. He's reminding us to hold our theological convictions with humility because we don't have all the answers.

Yeah, that's a good dose of perspective. Yeah. Especially when it comes to a topic that has sparked so much debate throughout history.

Right. So where does this leave us in terms of understanding our security in Christ? That's where Romans 8.31-39 comes in. Yeah.

It's a powerful affirmation of our unshakable security in Christ. This is where Paul really cranks up the volume on God's love. Declaring that nothing, and he means nothing, can separate us from it.

Keener pointed out that this echoes Psalm 118.6. Okay. The Lord is for me, I will not fear, what can man do to me? Wow. And that Psalm is also associated with Passover, which ties back into this whole new Exodus theme.

I'm starting to see these connections everywhere. Yeah, it's everywhere. Okay, so what specific things does Paul say can't separate us from God's love? He starts with accusations from Satan.

Okay. Who, according to Jewish tradition, can't even accuse us on the day of atonement. Then he lists all kinds of suffering, like famine, poverty, and persecution.

Things that the early Christians were facing every day. Exactly. But he doesn't stop there.

Nope, he goes all the way to death itself. Wow. Even death can't separate us from God's love.

Yeah. It's the kind of unshakable hope that we need in this world. It really does sound like a foundation that can withstand any storm.

Yeah. But as we move into Romans 9, there's a noticeable shift in tone. Yeah.

It feels heavier, more somber. What's going on there? Paul's mood becomes more sorrowful because of his deep anguish for his fellow Jews who haven't accepted Christ. Okay.

Keener compares Paul's willingness to be separated from Christ for their sake to Moses' plea in Exodus 32, where he asks God to either forgive the people or blot him out of the book of life. That's a powerful parallel. Yeah.

But ultimately, as Keener points out, God's choice reigns supreme. Yeah. He uses this really striking phrase, God has no grandchildren.

Oh, yeah. What do you think he means by that? It's a stark reminder that salvation is personal. Yeah.

You can't ride your parents' or grandparents' coattails into heaven. Right. It's a powerful message.

It really is. And maybe even uncomfortable for some people. Yeah.

But it's true. It challenges this idea that being ethnically Jewish guarantees salvation. Right.

And this was a radical idea at the time. And honestly, it still ruffles some feathers today. Keener emphasizes how throughout history, not all of Abraham's descendants inherited the promise.

Exactly. I'm thinking about how we went all the way back to the beginning with Abraham's sons, Isaac and Ishmael. Yeah.

Only Isaac received the promise, even though they were both sons of Abraham. Right. And then it happened again with Isaac's sons, Jacob and Esau.

Oh, wow. God chose Jacob, even though they were twins. Wow.

And what's even more striking is that Keener emphasizes that God's choice was made before they were even born, before they could do anything to earn or deserve his favor. It really highlights God's sovereignty, doesn't it? It does. And it underscores that God's choice is rooted in grace, not merit.

Absolutely. I'm still trying to wrap my head around how this all connects to the new Exodus theme that Keener keeps coming back to. Remember, the Exodus wasn't just a physical event.

Right. It was a spiritual deliverance. God was rescuing his people from slavery and setting them apart for himself.

And Keener argues that Paul is applying that same concept to the new covenant. So just as God chose Israel out of all the nations, he's now choosing a new people for himself, not based on ethnicity, but on faith in Christ. Precisely.

And this new Exodus isn't just about escaping something. It's about entering into something even greater, a relationship with God, a place in his kingdom. And that's where this idea of groaning comes back into play.

You mean that even though we've experienced the first fruits of the Spirit, we're still living in a world that's broken and groaning for redemption. Yes. We long for that full inheritance.

Right. The complete liberation of our bodies and souls. It's this tension between what we have now and what we're still waiting for.

Right. That Paul captures so beautifully in Romans 8. Absolutely. Speaking of tension, I have to ask about all this talk of predestination and God's sovereignty.

Sure. Does that mean we have no choice in the matter, like our lives are predetermined? That's the million dollar question that has puzzled theologians for centuries. All right.

And to be honest, Keener acknowledges that there's no easy answer. Okay. But his approach to this whole debate was refreshing.

What do you mean? He digs into the historical context. Okay. To show how Jewish thinkers in Paul's day didn't have the sharp distinction between human responsibility and God's sovereignty that we often make today.

They didn't see them as mutually exclusive. So they believe that God was in control. Yeah.

But they also recognize that humans had choices to make. Exactly. Kiener gives the example of Josephus, the Jewish historian who wrote about different Jewish sects.

Josephus tried to categorize these sects based on Greek philosophical schools, like the Stoics and Epicureans. He portrayed the Essenes as totally predestinarian and the Sadducees as not believing in divine providence at all. It sounds like two extremes.

Yes. Where did the Pharisees fit in? Josephus compared them to the Stoics, who believed in a balance between God's control and human responsibility. But here's the fascinating part.

When you look at the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were written by the Essenes... Right. ...you find evidence that they also believed in human choice. So it's more complex than Josephus made it seem.

Much more complex. And Kiener's point is that this either, thinking about predestination, wasn't really present in Paul's world. Okay.

They held these two ideas in tension, recognizing that God's ways are higher than our ways. That's a great reminder for us today. Yeah.

We can get so caught up in trying to fit God into our neat theological boxes... Right. ...that we miss the mystery and majesty of his sovereignty. Absolutely.

It's also fascinating to see how the Greek fathers had to grapple with these ideas in a different context. Yeah. Because they were interacting with Greek philosophy.

They emphasized free will more strongly. Right. Were they pushing back against something specific in their culture? Yes.

They were combating the rising determinism of their time. Ideas like astrology, which they saw as undermining human agency. And then there's Augustine... Right.

...who is a key figure in the development of Christian thought on predestination. He really wrestled with this. Yeah.

His views seem to have evolved quite a bit over time. Absolutely. Okay.

His early writings emphasize free will, but later on he became a strong defender of predestination... ...because he was fighting against Pelagius... Right. ...who taught that humans could achieve perfection on their own. Oh, wow.

So it was like he was swinging the pendulum in the other direction. But was he ultimately for predestination or against it? It's more complicated than that. Okay.

Keener points out that Augustine's main point was to emphasize humanity's complete dependence on God's grace. Okay. He was trying to uphold the idea that we are saved by grace, not by our own efforts.

I'm seeing that this whole debate has layers upon layers of complexity. Yeah. And that's exactly Keener's point.

He brings up all these different perspectives to show us that theological debates have a long and complex history. Right. We need to be careful about reading our own assumptions back into the biblical text.

And try to understand it on its own terms. That's a good principle for interpreting any text, really. Absolutely.

So after all this historical context, where does Keener himself land on this whole predestination debate? Yeah. Does he say, I'm a Calvinist or I'm an Arminian? He doesn't explicitly choose a side. Okay.

But he does offer a suggestion that I found really intriguing. Okay. He proposes that maybe God is so sovereign that he can even work through human free will.

So he's not choosing one or the other. Right. He's suggesting that it could be both.

Yeah. It's almost like he's saying that God is bigger than our theological category. Yeah.

It's a reminder to hold our beliefs with humility and openness to different perspectives. I appreciate that. Yeah.

It's a breath of fresh air in a debate that can often feel very rigid and divisive. And it brings us back to the central theme of God's grace. Yes.

Because ultimately, whether we lean more towards Calvinism or Arminianism, Right. we have to acknowledge that salvation is a gift. Absolutely.

It's not something we earn or deserve. It's something we receive. Yes.

And that levels the playing field. Right. No one can boast about being more deserving than anyone else.

Yeah. We're all on equal footing at the foot of the cross. I love that image.

Yeah. And it makes me think about Paul's passion for ensuring that the Gentiles understand that they're fully included in God's plan of salvation. Yeah.

It wasn't an afterthought. Right. It was central to the gospel.

And it's beautiful to see how he connects this back to the promises God made to Abraham way back in Genesis. Yeah. Keener pointed out that those promises weren't just for Abraham's physical descendants, but for all nations.

Exactly. It was meant to spread outwards like ripples in a pond. Right.

And that's exactly what we see happening in the New Testament. Yeah. As the gospel goes out from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

It's like the fulfillment of that ancient promise. It is. And it's still unfolding today as people from every tribe and tongue and nation are being drawn to Christ.

Absolutely. We've covered a lot of ground in this deep dive. Yeah, we have.

From groaning in the New Exodus to predestination and God's sovereignty. It's been all over the place. Been quite a journey.

It has. We've encountered twists and turns, wrestled with tough questions, and discovered some profound insights along the way. And through it all, Keener has been a fantastic guide.

He has. Helping us navigate these complex theological ideas with clarity and passion. He has a gift for making even the most challenging concepts accessible and engaging.

So after all this, what's the one thing you want our listener to walk away with? Okay. What's the big takeaway from this deep dive into Romans 8.23 to 9.1's text? I think it's this. In the midst of all our struggles and uncertainties, we can find unshakeable security in God's unwavering love.

That is a beautiful truth. It is. It's the anchor that holds us steady through the storms of life.

And it's also the foundation for our hope, both now and in the future. Wow. No matter what we face, nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen to that. Yeah. So after this incredible journey through Romans, what final image or thought does Keener leave us to ponder? He leaves us with this powerful idea that our ultimate identity is as God's children.

Wow. It's a truth that will remain even when everything else fades away. It really is the bedrock of our existence.

It is. This whole deep dive has given me so much to think about. Me too.

It's a reminder that even familiar passages of Scripture can offer fresh insights. Yeah. And challenge us in new ways.

I especially appreciate how Keener helped connect the dots between the Old and New Testaments. Me too. The New Exodus theme has really come alive for me.

It's a powerful framework for understanding God's redemptive work. Right. Throughout history and in our lives today.

As we wrap up, I want to leave our listener with a question. Okay. What does this New Exodus mean for you today? How does the promise of God's unfailing love impact your life, especially in the midst of challenges? It's a question worth wrestling with.

Yeah. It is. Take some time to reflect on it and you might be surprised by what you discover.

This has been an amazing deep dive. It has. Until next time.

It's a question we should all be asking ourselves. Yeah. How does this apply to me? How does it apply to me today? Right.

You know, because we can get so caught up in the heady theological discussions. Right. We can lose sight of the practical implications.

And, you know, for me, one of the things that Keener really drove home was the importance of living out our faith in community. It's not just about having this individualistic relationship with God. Right.

It's about being part of a body where we can support each other. Yeah. Encourage each other.

And challenge each other to grow. Exactly. Because that's how the world sees the reality of God's love.

So they get a glimpse of heaven. Yeah. It's not just about what we say.

It's about how we live. I think that's a great place to leave it. Yeah.

Just a reminder that our faith is not meant to be lived in isolation. It's meant to be lived in community. Yeah.

Where we can spur each other on towards love and good deeds. And as we journey together towards that new exodus. Yes.

Let's remember that we have the unshakable promise of God's love to sustain us every step of the way. Wow. This has been such a rich and thought-provoking deep dive.

It really has. Thank you so much for sharing your insights. It's been my pleasure.

I know our listeners are going to glean so much from this. I hope so. Until next time, keep digging deeper into the word.

Yeah. Keep seeking the truth. Absolutely.

Grace and peace to you all. And to you as well.