



The Golden Chain of Salvation: Part 2

Romans 8:28-30

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Our text this morning should look familiar. It's the same text we had last week: Romans 8:28-30. Please give attention to the reading of God's Holy Word. For the Word of the Lord is completely inerrant, the Word of the Lord is completely sufficient, and the Word of the Lord is completely authoritative. Romans 8, beginning at verse 28:

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."

Thus far the reading of God's Holy Word. Let's pray for his blessing upon it. Heavenly Father, we ask that you would open up your Word to us, that as we look in it we would see your great promise to us, that we would see the matchless worth of the Lord Jesus Christ, that there is none like him, and that we would understand that our salvation is found in Jesus alone. This we ask in Christ's precious name, amen.

As we come once again to this text, I will confess to you that at the beginning of this week, as I looked at what was before us, I had thoughts of telling you there's going to be a part 3, maybe a part 4, but I decided to go with my original revised plan, and we're just going to work our way through this. We're going to hit all of the major topics in this text, but we may not go into as great of a length of detail as you would like with perhaps one of your favorite verses.

Again, as I mentioned to you last week, if you want more depth, I commend to you the 17 sermons by Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones on these three verses. Last week, what we looked at was the first of a three-point, two-part sermon: the great promise of God. We saw that it was a promise that comes only to those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul described it as "for those who love God" and "who are called according to his purpose."

You'll remember that those two statements described the same set of people. They were not two distinct groups: those who love God and those who are called. They're two statements describing the same group of people who love God *and* are called according to God's purpose. This was important as we looked at the promise itself, because the promise has in mind the purpose of God. It's not that all things are good for believers. Rather, all things, both good and bad things, are used by God for his purpose, and his purpose is for our ultimate good.

Finally, we saw that we can know the promise and know it is true because God has given a record of the outworkings of his purpose in the Bible. We saw this in his dealings with Israel and even with the saints of the Old Testament, Jacob, Joseph, and David. We also saw that *you* can know the promise is true for *you* by examining yourself. Do you love God? Do you show the traits of someone called by God? If you do, then that promise is for you.

The Purpose of God

This brings us this morning to the *purpose* of God. That is really the main point of the passage. All that preceded is the outworking of God's purpose. As we look at the purpose of God, we see that there are three things. First, God's purpose is to *have a people for himself*. Second, God's purpose is to *make his people like his Son*. Third, God's purpose is to *glorify his Son*.

Let's look, then, at God's purpose to have for himself a people. The fact that this text focuses on God's purpose is sometimes lost on us, because if we're honest with ourselves, we tend to focus on what concerns *us* in the Bible. So we think the most important thing is that all things will work together for us, and we think that's the emphasis of the passage, but that's not the emphasis either of this passage or of the Bible. The Bible begins with God, and then it shows how God's purpose and plan affect us.

Let me put it plainly. The great statement we must hold onto is not that all things work together for our good. The great statement we must hold onto is that all things work together for God's purpose. That is the great statement of this text. Now, God's purpose *does* have an effect *on* us. Because of God's purpose, all things work together for my good, but we must understand the cause and the effect.

It's not that all things work together for my good because I love God. My love is not the cause of this. No. All things work together for my good because I am called according to his purpose. This is, if we think about it, a comforting truth. It doesn't depend on you or your works or your love for God. Rather, your blessing, your righteousness, your security all depend on God and on his purpose. You are safe in his hands.

So, what *is* God's purpose? Let's begin with the broadest principle. In one sense, God's purpose is the same he designed in the garden of Eden. God created Adam and Eve for a purpose. Now, he did not create Adam and Eve because he needed them. God was not lonely. We need to get that idea out of our heads. God doesn't need mankind.

It's not as if God was sitting around lonely, wondering who he could have a relationship with, and thought up the idea of creating man. No. We know the Bible reveals that God is triune. That is, God is three persons in one being. What that means is God has an eternal, perfect, loving relationship within himself. He has no need for anything outside. That makes sense, because if he had need of something he wouldn't be God.

God did not create Adam and Eve for his benefit. No. God created Adam because he purposed to have a people for himself. He created Adam to be his vice-regent over creation, to rule over creation, to be fruitful and to multiply, to bring about a multitude of people who would worship and serve the Lord. That's why God created Adam.

But of course, Adam failed in that. He sinned, and in the fall a chasm was opened up. Man was separated from God by sin. Creation itself groans under the burden of sin. We saw this in verse 22 of this eighth chapter of Romans. The people of God rebelled against God himself, but God did not give up his purpose. This shouldn't surprise us, because nothing can stop the purpose of God, even sin.

Instead, God told Adam his plan right there in the garden in Genesis 3:15. It was the barest expression of the plan, but it was his plan. He said he would send a redeemer, the seed of the woman, who would crush the Enemy and sin and redeem sinners to himself. Now, if you think about it, the rest of the Bible is just an expansion and a description of this plan.

God revealed more to Noah, still more to Abraham when he called him out, even more to Moses when he told Moses he was keeping his promised relationship with the descendants of Abraham who had now become the nation of Israel. Throughout all of the Old Testament, God was revealing more and more of his plan to redeem for himself a people.

Something else interesting happened in the Old Testament, especially in the Prophets. God made it clear that his plan was not just to redeem for himself a small people, a narrow ethnic people, just descendants of Abraham. Isaiah tells us that would be far too small an inheritance for the Messiah. No. God revealed that he would redeem for himself sinners out of every tribe, tongue, and nation. He would call to himself not only the Jews but the Gentiles also.

The story of the New Testament is the outworking of that call to the Gentiles, first in the Gospels, and then in the book of Acts. As Paul is made an apostle to the Gentiles, we see over and over again this theme of the universal scope of redemption, that there are some from every nation who are called to be a part of the people of God. God's purpose is to have a people, and because of sin the only way that purpose can be fulfilled is through salvation.

So what does God do? Well, of course, he designed, decreed, and planned salvation to keep his purpose. God will not let anything come between his purpose and its fulfillment. This is what Paul says at the end of verse 28. Look at it with me. "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."

Paul says all things work together for good. For whom do they work? For those who love God and are called. Why are they called? According to the purpose of God. We might even say *because of* the purpose of God. Because of God's purpose his people are called and they love him because of his purpose. The origin of all of this is the purpose of God. It's not our need. It's not our worth. It's not our love. It's the purpose of God.

This is how you must come to the Bible. The Bible is not a series of disconnected moral principles. It's not a history of ancient peoples. It's not even literature. The Bible is the story of God's glorious purpose being worked out in time. God's purpose is to have a people for himself. The question *you* face is... *Will you be a part of his people?* If you would be a part of his people, the Bible tells you what you must do.

You must recognize that you are separated from God, that you cannot do anything to bridge that gap, that you must trust what God has already done in sending his Son to redeem for himself a people. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you *will* be saved and you *will* be a part of God's people. But there is more to God's purpose than that. Possessing a people for himself is just the start. It is a *critical* start, but it is a start nonetheless.

It's not enough for the people of God to be forgiven. Now, you *must* be forgiven. Adam's sin and your own sin separate you from God, and the only way you can be right with God and have a relationship with God is to be forgiven of your sin, but we cannot forget that Adam was created in righteousness. He was innocent. It's not just that his slate was blank. No, he was positively righteous.

So, perhaps we would expect that God would have a purpose to restore sinners to the state Adam was in. On the one hand, that would be glorious. Adam was the pinnacle of creation. He alone was made in the image of God. He was the one who named all of the animals. He was given charge of the garden to work it and to keep it.

On the other hand, Adam failed. He sinned. He didn't keep the estate in which he was created. So how glorious could such an insecure position be? This is where we see how glorious God's purpose is. God did not just purpose redemption from sin. He did not just plan for his people to be forgiven. It was not just that they would be restored to the place of Adam. God is not just reacting to events.

Sometimes we think God's plan was a reaction to the fall, as if God said to himself, "Well, Adam, I didn't expect you to fall so quickly. I didn't expect you'd mess up like this and I would have to find a way to fix everything." The Bible tells us, actually, that God purposed salvation before the foundation of the world, which is before the fall. It means God had a purpose in salvation beyond mere redemption, if we can put it that way.

We see this in Ephesians, chapter 1, verse 4. "...even as he [God] chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him." Again, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2, when he's describing the great mystery of the gospel, "But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory."

I think perhaps the clearest expression of this is in 2 Timothy 1:9. "[God] saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace..." There's that language again. "...which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began..." You see, God is not adjusting to fix things. He always had something more glorious planned.

So what was that purpose? That purpose was that his people would be made greater than Adam; that is, people would be made like his Son. You see, the work Jesus accomplished was more than forgiveness. It was also, Paul tells us, so God's people would be conformed to the image of his Son. Think about that. From all eternity, Paul says, God foreknew and predestined this for his people. From all eternity God determined that they would be made like Jesus.

God's plan is to transform *you*, the believer, into the image of Christ. What wonder is that? It's what Paul describes in Philippians 3. "[God] will transform our lowly body to be like his [Jesus'] glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself." Now, if you say to yourself, "But, Pastor, I don't know what that means. What does that look like? How could I be like Jesus? I can't even get my arms around that," well, then I tell you, along with the apostle John, join the club. All you need to know is that you will be made like Christ.

John puts it *this* way in his first epistle, chapter 3: "...we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared..." John says, "I don't know what we *will* be exactly." This is the apostle John speaking. He says, "...but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is." What a promise, that you will be like Jesus Christ, that God is not just restoring you to the greatest specimen of humanity ever in Adam; he's restoring you into the image of his Son, Jesus Christ.

Now, the next question we may ask is... *Why?* Why has God purposed such glory for his people? It's one thing for God to gather for himself a people. It's still another thing to restore them to the place from which they'd fallen, but why would God grant such blessing and glory to sinners like you and me? What have we done to deserve the blessing of being conformed to the image of his Son?

Do you know what the answer is? Nothing. There is nothing we can do to earn this blessing. Paul is once again pointing us away from ourselves and toward God. The whole tenor of this glorious passage we have been looking at these past two Sundays is to highlight the purpose of God, the sovereignty of God, and the glory of God.

Now, there *is* a purpose that is a reason why God makes his people like his Son. We see it in verse 29. It is very clear in the English. It's very clear in the Greek, but you don't even need the Greek because the English is so clear. Look with me at verse 29. "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that..." There's your purpose. There's your reason: what follows. "...in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."

The Lord has gathered a people and has made them in Christ's image so that Christ would have the glory of being the firstborn of many brothers. When the Bible speaks of Jesus as the firstborn, it's not speaking of a priority of birth, primarily. After all, Jesus was not created like the rest of mankind. If we think about it, it's not even like Jesus was chronologically born before some of the saints of the Old Testament, like Moses or Abraham or David.

So what does the Bible mean when it uses this term *firstborn*? What it means is that Jesus has priority over all others. He is the first among all God's people. He is the primary one, and he *should* be. He's the one who purchased our redemption. He is the one to whom all others are being conformed. He is alone the God-man. He is firstborn. He is primary.

The Bible uses this phrase *firstborn* in exactly this way in other contexts. For example, the Lord tells Moses to speak to Pharaoh in Exodus, chapter 4. He says, "Thus says the Lord, Israel is my firstborn." What the

Lord means there is, "I have a special relationship with Israel. Israel is primary to me amongst all of the peoples of the world."

That's the story of the Old Testament. When Psalm 89 speaks of David the king, it says, "And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth." It doesn't mean David is older than every other king in the world. It means David is higher and above every other king. God has set him there to a place of preeminence.

This is the purpose of God from all eternity: to have a people who are conformed to the image of God's Son, Jesus Christ, so that Jesus Christ would be glorified. Paul puts it wonderfully in Colossians, chapter 1. He says, "[Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation." Why? "For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth... And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent."

There is nothing you could possibly think of today in all of creation or its history that Jesus is not preeminent in. He's preeminent in creation. He's preeminent in the sustaining of the universe. He's preeminent in redemption. He's preeminent in the church. He preeminently shows forth the glory of God. Jesus is preeminent. This is the purpose of God: to have a people and to conform them to the image of Jesus Christ that Jesus might receive all the glory.

The Perseverance of God

Now let's look at how the purpose of God is unfolded in time. Paul started by showing us God's promise. He then showed us how the promise was rooted in God's purpose and, therefore, can never fail, and now we look at how God executes that purpose. Paul gives us a picture of how that purpose unfolds. I'm using that word deliberately. He is opening up the outworking of God's purpose piece by piece in the order in which it shows itself. The way he describes it causes most theologians to describe it as a chain going from link to link but making up one whole. I am not being original in entitling this sermon *The Golden Chain of Salvation*.

Paul begins with the first link in the chain, which is often the most difficult for many: *predestination*. Now, before we get into the details of this, there's something we need to see to help us understand. Paul says in verse 30 "those whom he predestined." "And those whom he predestined he also called..." When he says "those whom he predestined," this is not introducing a new grouping. It's not as if he's introducing a new subject. The "those whom" is actually a relative pronoun.

Now what does that mean? Grammatically, it refers back to an antecedent, to what Paul said before, so he doesn't have to repeat it. What Paul could have said in verse 30 was, "And those who love God, for whom all things work together and who are called according to the purpose of God and whom he foreknew, them he predestined," but that's a mouthful.

So instead, Paul just says, "Those whom he predestined." He's pointing back to everything he said. This does not come out of the blue. Everything Paul is about to talk about in this chain applies to those who love

God, to those who love because they're called according to God's purpose, and to those who will be conformed into the image of Christ.

If we're honest, we will understand that the concept of predestination does not appeal to Americans. We like to think we could be whatever we want to be, that we're beholden to no one. As a matter of fact, we don't think it's fair if salvation begins with God choosing. It should be up to *me*. It should be up to *us*. Why should *God* get to choose? *We* should get to choose God.

Why *is* that? Why would someone want to have their eternal destiny based upon their own choice rather than the choice of a perfectly good, perfectly wise, perfectly powerful God? The answer, I think, is that we want the credit. Even though salvation is by grace, not by works, we want to have a part in our grace, or at least our decision to *take* the grace.

We say to ourselves, "What makes me different from someone who doesn't believe is that I'm just a little bit smarter than they are. I'm just a little bit more open to God. I believe in God because of who I am, and if you were as good as me, you'd believe in God too. Can't you rustle up some belief in God?" Have you ever had the misfortune to be in a family where the constant phrase was, "Why can't you be like your brother?" or "Why can't you be like your sister?" where you're constantly in a comparison mode?

You see, we love to compare if we're on the top, but we don't like it when we're on the bottom. Paul turns this American view of equality on its head. He says everything starts with God. Salvation begins, Paul says, in the purpose and in the mind of God. He decides beforehand. That's what the word *predestined* means. It means to choose beforehand. God is the one in charge. He is the one determining whom he will save.

This is actually something we should be glad about. Remember, this passage doesn't come to us dropping out of the sky. We've been studying the book of Romans now for several months, and Paul has been building up an argument. Why would we be glad if we don't get to choose? Because if it were up to us, we would all be lost.

Do you remember that Paul told us in chapter 3 no one understands, no one seeks after God, no one does good? So let me ask you this question... *What part of "no one" do you think doesn't apply to you?* There's no exception there. There's no footnote. It's not as if we open up our Bibles and see that verse and there's a footnote that says, "Except Bob," "Except Mary," "Except Joe." No, it says, "No one seeks after God. No one does good. No one wants God."

Paul has been building up this argument. It's his point in chapter 1. It's his point in chapter 2. It's his point in chapter 3. You'll remember Paul went out of his way to take every possible category of person...rank pagans, philosophical pagans, religious people, moralistic people, people who understand the law of God. He says they're all in the same boat. None of them seek after God. Sin has so blinded us we don't even think we need saving. If it were not for God coming to us, we would never seek him.

Now, some look at verse 29 where it says, "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son," and they say, "Aha! I've got it here. God foreknew. Don't you know God is bigger than time? God is outside time. So what God does is he looks down the corridor of time and sees who will choose him, and then he chooses *them*. He chooses them based on *their* choice of *him*." Are you following me so far?

What they say is it really is up to us, and God sees our choice and sees what we do and, therefore, he foreknows what we will do, and he chooses us. They say that's what *foreknow* means. God knows beforehand who will choose him. But this is just sleight of hand. Ask *this* question: "How does God foreknow?" They'll say, "Well, he knows by their faith." Then ask *this* question: "Where does their faith come from?"

Paul has been telling us from Romans 1 onward that all mankind is bound up in sin and it doesn't seek God and it doesn't believe. The Bible tells us that faith comes from God (Ephesians 2:8). This is exactly what Jesus told Nicodemus. Do you remember that Nicodemus asked Jesus what he must do and Jesus said, "You must be born again"? Nicodemus didn't really understand that. He said, "How do I come out of my mother's womb again? What do I do?"

You remember, though, what Jesus says. "Let me give you a picture. The Spirit works like the wind. And how does the wind blow? Wherever it wills." Think about that. You can go home today, and if it gets up into the mid-70s like they say, your house may be a little warmer than we've had these past few weeks. I don't advise that you open up the door and go, "Wind, come through the house now." You'll be waiting there an awfully long time, because the wind does not come at your beck and call.

The wind blows wherever it wills. That's an analogy to the work of God. The Spirit blows wherever he wills. Who's in charge? God. So, how could it possibly be that God looks through the corridors of time and sees that someone will choose him based on the faith God will give them, I guess because he saw they were going to choose and want the faith, and then he chooses them and gives them the faith after choosing so they can choose. Are you confused yet? Because *I* am.

It's really just an attempt to get around the plain words of Scripture. When God tells us in Romans 8 that he foreknew someone, look at what he's foreknowing. It's actually pretty simple. It doesn't say *what* he foreknew; it says *whom* he foreknew. It's not saying that God knows what will happen in the future. It says God knows his people. This knowledge is more than just a knowing. It involves a relationship, a sense of love and companionship.

We see this all the way back in the beginning of the Bible when the Bible tells us that Adam *knew* Eve. I guarantee you it was not that Adam had asked Eve for her phone number and her blood type. He did not just know *about* her. He *knew* her. She was his wife. He loved her. He had set his affections upon her. They were together bound. That's what the word *know* means throughout the Old Testament. It has an emphasis of relationship in addition to knowledge. The same is true for God and his people. He sets his love on them first. He knew them as his people, and then he called them to himself.

Let's now briefly look at the connecting link in the chain. We can be brief here because we've been looking at this link in the chain throughout the entirety of the book of Romans. The connecting link between predestination and calling of God's people and their glorification is *justification*. Paul wants us to understand that salvation is not theoretical.

God is actually bringing about the justification of his people through the work of Jesus, and he's showing us here that there is a certainty to this justification. Justification is not random. It follows the eternal purpose and plan of God, but it's also true that God's plan cannot be stopped. Notice the complete fulfillment of God's plan as it is described. *All* who are predestined are *all* called, and *all* who are called are *all* justified. It's not that God has a pretty good batting average. It's *all* in each of these instances. They're the same people.

There's something else that's important here. This link is the place we begin to tell others about salvation. The context for Paul talking about the eternal plan and purpose of God is not for evangelism. He is writing to the church for their comfort. So we don't begin with those who are lost by saying, "Have you thought about whether you were elected or called lately?" That's not the place where we begin.

To use a word picture, it's as if someone were falling off a cliff and we had a chain and were holding two ends of the chain in our hand and we leant the chain down. We would tell them to grab the chain they can see. "Don't ask me to let go of one of the ends so you can see it and grab *that* one." The link of the chain that we see is justification. It's what comes to us. After all, how would we understand the eternal purpose of God if we don't know God yet? It's interesting what Paul is doing here.

Finally, we come to the last link in the chain: *glorification*. We see that the eternal purpose of God worked out in time in our justification leads to an eternal end: glory. It's interesting how Paul puts this. He uses a past tense. Do you see that? "Those who are justified..." Past tense. "...are glorified." Paul is talking to people in Rome who are very much alive, and we are reading this text as people who are very much alive.

Do you feel now like you are glorified? If you're anything like me, your aches and pains tell you otherwise. Your trials and suffering tell you otherwise. Your sins that you commit and being sinned against tell you otherwise. So why would Paul do this in the past tense? He does this to remind us of the certainty of the end for all those whom God has set his love upon. It's as if it has already been accomplished.

We see something like this in the Old Testament Prophets. There's actually a Hebrew grammar term for it. It's called the *prophetic future*. You use a past tense to describe an event in the future, as a prophet, because it is so certain of fulfillment it's as if it has already happened. The emphasis is on the certainty, not on the timing.

This makes sense, because if God's eternal purpose and plan is to make his children into the image of God, then they would have to be glorified. How could you be in the image of Jesus Christ and not be glorified? What Paul has done for us in this golden chain is to link the present journey of God's people (remember the context of suffering this passage comes in) to the undefeatable and eternal plan of God.

All of your trials, all of your struggles now are bounded by God's eternal purpose, his eternal purpose to bring you to himself and to set his love upon you forever in glory. Paul is not telling you to forget your troubles. He's not saying your suffering is not real. He's giving you comfort and perspective on them so you will look up from yourself to God. Will you look to him now?

Look to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the fulfillment of God's eternal plan and the consummation of what God has called his children to be. The only way of salvation is to believe on Jesus Christ. It is not enough to believe in election to be saved. You must believe in Jesus and his work. Once you do, as you study the Bible, you will see God's eternal purpose for you and be comforted by his wisdom and power.