

## The Goodness of God Worked Out in Our Lives

**Please turn with me to Romans 8.** In the British Museum there is a mariner's map drawn in the 1500's outlining the North American coastline. At that point little of America's interior had been explored and the cartographer made some intriguing notations on areas of the map representing regions not yet explored. He wrote on different sections, "Here be giants," "here be fiery scorpions," and "here be dragons." A hundred years later the map came into the possession of British explorer Sir John Franklin. He scratched out all these fearful inscriptions and wrote in their place, "here be God."

When it comes to our lives, there is so much that is unexplored territory. We really don't know what tomorrow holds. We may think we do, we may have plans and expectations but the reality is that we really don't know. Every day that is still in front of us is uncharted territory.

*Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring. Prov. 27:1*

*You do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. James 4:14*

The question is what do we write on the map of those uncharted portions of our lives? Future unexplored territories like: (For singles) will I ever get married? Who will I marry? (For those married): will my marriage get stronger or weaker in the years to come? How will my kids turn out? Will I have the health problems that run in my family? Will I have my job five years from now? What will the future hold if I step out in that business venture that is in my heart to do? Will my loved ones come to Christ? How will my life end? The fact is that tomorrow, and even an hour from now, is uncharted territory.

The question is, what do we write on the map of those uncharted territories? Maybe we don't write "here be dragons" but we might feel like writing, "here be giants" – giants of unknown that loom over us and overwhelm and intimidate us. Maybe we want to write "here be fear" or "here be failure" or "here be loss". The optimists among us might write "here be success" or "here be adventure" or "here be better days". Others might feel like the days will go on pretty much the same, "here be not much new", or "here be just getting by". What do we write? And the next question is, what would God have us write?

For the last three weeks we've been in a series on the goodness of God, this morning we're going to finish up this series by looking at an amazing promise that every believer in Jesus Christ can write on the map of the uncharted lands of our futures: we really can't be certain of what lies there, but the one thing we can write with certainty is "here be God." And, because God is there, we can also write, "here be good". Let's read **Romans 8:28-39** but we're going to focus on verse 28.

Verse 28 contains an amazing promise – *all things are working out for good* – and Paul lays it out as a certainty, "*And we know...*" There may be many things we don't know, but one thing we know is, everything is working out for good. We can be certain of that because God promises it. It's a massive promise and I want us to look at it from three angles: *the foundation, the condition, and the application of the promise that all things work together.*

### I. The foundation of the promise that all things work together for good

As we've been looking at, God is good. Through and through His infinite being, His infinite heart, God is good with a blazing and pure goodness. God could never do anything bad, it's impossible for God to do anything bad, because there's not a microbe of evil or badness in God. He governs the universe and heaven from the pure and unchanging motive of what's good for His creation. His rule is good. His commands are good. His purposes are good. His actions are good. His motives are good. Satan's

temptation to Eve was to question God's motive: *Did God really say you would die? He knows that if you eat of it you not die, you will experience a great good, and He doesn't want that for you.* God has bad motives for His command. Satan has been trying to get us to question God's goodness ever since.

Even God's judgments are good. I totally understand people questioning why God would punish people by sending them to hell. I would prefer that not be the case. But the fact is it is what is good and best for creation. He would be unloving to *not* send those who refuse Him to hell. It would contaminate heaven with a rebellion that would make devils out of every one of us, and those who hate God, as much as they will hate hell, they would hate to spend eternity with God even more. Even hell is an expression of God's goodness. Even God's wrath is an extension of His goodness. This is mind boggling cause it's not how we operate, but God's fury and His goodness aren't two separate things. They go hand in hand. So on Judgment Day people will weep and gnash their teeth in horrifying regret, but no one will argue with God because on that day all will see that God's acts and His judgments are good, and it will be impossible to argue with that.

So when Paul says that all things work together for good, he doesn't mean that the "all things" are working for our good as if there is this benevolent karma in the universe that is pulling for us. He means that God is working in and through all things for our good. All things aren't good, and some things are very bad, but for His children God bends all things – even bad things - towards our ultimate good. The foundation of this promise is the goodness of God. A good God could have no other plans for His children than good. We live in a world where bad and good collide, but for the believer good will always be the final product because God is sovereignly working them – bending them – to good. But let's go a little deeper into the foundation laid out in this passage.

### **An eternal look back and an eternal look forward**

Paul bases our certainty on God's working all things together for our good on verse 29 and 30, which looks back through the corridors of eternity past and forward to eternity future:

*29 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. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. Rom. 8:29-30*

A week ago an American free diver died after attempting a 200 foot dive with no fins. His death made me want to learn more about the sport known as free diving. Free divers don't use oxygen tanks, they just hold their breath and dive down as deep as they can. Sometimes they use fins, sometimes they don't. The record for diving on a breath of air with fins is over 700 feet. That's like submerging a 58 story skyscraper into the ocean and then swimming down to the first floor lobby. That's deep!

Let me warn you: verses 29 and 30 have some very deep theology – we could go really deep into questions like *what does it mean that God foreknew us? Or, what does it mean that He predestined us?* Time doesn't allow us to go too deep this morning– so you won't need your theology scuba gear on this morning, just take a deep breath and let's jump in.

Much of Romans chapter 8 speaks of eternity future. Our hope as Christians is anchored to eternity and our lives here are always groaning for the eternal life that awaits us. So beginning in verse 18 Paul begins to look into the eternal future of believers and sees that any suffering we endure in this life now is nothing compared to the good, the glory of what God has for us. It is that eternal good that Paul has

primarily in mind when he says all things are working together for good – the believer is destined for an eternity of good because of the gift of Jesus Christ.

But in verse 29, Paul shifts from gazing into eternity future to looking at eternity past. For those whom God *foreknew* – that is those He knew and sovereignly chose for adoption before the foundations of the world. Somewhere in the past corridors of eternity God knew His children and predestined them. That can be a controversial word but it means simply that our destiny isn't up for grabs – it is eternally fixed by decree of God. And what is it? Here's where Paul takes us on an unbroken string from eternity past to eternity future: *those he foreknew, he also predestined (this is all eternity past) to be conformed to the image of His Son (eternity future). Those He predestined he called and those He called He justified (where eternity intersects with the moment a person get saved) and those He justified he also glorified (eternity future).* So the great good God is causing all things to work together to produce is that we be glorified and be like His Son Jesus. That is amazing because Jesus is the most glorious Being in the universe – He is the second Person of the Trinity and all creation will bow and confess him as Lord over all. We won't be deity, but we will be conformed into his image which is a good beyond words are able to convey. We'll just have to wait to see just how good that is, but there could be no greater good that God could plan for His children. So the foundation of this massive promise of eternal, future good for our lives isn't founded on a whim of the moment or a random turn of events in our lives. It is founded on God's certain foreknowledge and decree made in eternity past, before the world was even created. The promise going forward is unshakable because its foundation goes deep into eternity past.

## II. The condition of the promise that all things work together for good

This promise isn't for everyone. It has a condition. It's for those who *love God and are called according to His purpose*. This is a description of a person who is saved. Being saved isn't just repeating a prayer after someone; it isn't just having the right doctrine or being ultra orthodox in our creed, it's a supernatural work that gives us a heart that loves God. That love may ebb and flow. It might be a raging fire some days and a smoking ember other days, but if a person is saved there is a love for God in his or her heart. That's why God's word calls us to stir the embers of love for the Lord. We should always be on the lookout to make sure we haven't left our first love.

If you aren't a Christian, this all might seem kind of confusing and you might even think that God's foreknowledge means the game is rigged and there's nothing anyone can do about it. Some people have even believed that there's no use in preaching the gospel cause if God wants to save people He can do it without our help.

As I read God's word, I see only evidence that anyone who would come to Jesus will be saved. That the reason some people aren't saved isn't because God chose not to save them, but because they refused to come to Jesus and be saved. The game isn't rigged, and in fact it's not a game. It's a gift. If you want to be saved, and realize you need to be saved, God's word says simply, *come to Jesus and you will be saved*. God will give you an eternal hope that cannot be taken away, and no matter what lies ahead in the uncharted territories of your life – even on that day when you come to the far coastline of your life and breath your last breath – no matter what, God has good in store for you. Eternal good and eternal life. I urge you to come to Jesus and not wait another day. In John 6:37 Jesus says, *whoever comes to me I will never cast out*. The original Greek reads, *I will not, not cast out, or I will never, never cast out*. Jesus means it when he invites you to come to him in simple childlike faith. Will you do that today? The condition of the promise is for those who come to Christ and are saved – who love God and are called according to His purpose.

## III. The application of the promise that all things work together for good

What practical application does this have in our lives? Let me mention two.

1. *It anchors our lives in assurance of hope*

The Bible never denies that bad things happen to God's children. Heartbreak, tragedy, loss, suffering, betrayal, loneliness, sickness, grief, death all happen to Christians just like everyone else. These verses aren't meant to be a smiley face sticker that we slap on hard times. Because of this promise we can rejoice in everything, but that doesn't mean we are to become what Matt Chandler calls "chirpey" Christians. We are to rejoice with those who rejoice, but we are to weep with those who weep. Weeping is not only a very real possibility in this life, it is in fact an inevitability.

And the Bible doesn't deny that. But what the Bible does do is look beyond the weeping to the end, the culmination, what lies at the end of the end, and what it reveals is that there is a day when every tear will be wiped away. In the Lord of the Rings Sam Gamgee asks Gandalf: *is everything sad going to come untrue?* The answer is yes. Everything sad, everything tragic, everything lost, will be bent to good. Ultimate and eternal good. And for those who say, "yeah, but that can't undo the bad that I'm experiencing today" CS Lewis has this to say:

*[Some people] say of some temporal suffering, "No future bliss can make up for it," not knowing that Heaven, once attained, will work backwards and turn even that agony into a glory.*

In other words, it won't just be that the good overshadows the bad, but the good will reach backwards and make the bad a glorious good that we will bless God for. Only God can do that, but Romans 8:28-30 promises that He will. Our lives are anchored in the assurance of hope.

2. *It propels our lives forward with risk-taking faith*

Know that uncharted territory of tomorrow? We don't have to approach it with fear or resignation; we can run towards it with a risk-taking faith. Not a reckless presumption – if we're acting out of a presumption on God that is careless and reckless, God very well might allow us to hit the wall pretty hard. He'll be there to pick us up and [ultimately] even that will be used for our good, but trust me, it's better not to hit that wall in the first place.

But this promise is too good to put on a trophy case in our homes where we look at it every once in a while, maybe take it out to dust it off once a year. It's meant to affect our willingness to serve the Lord in ways that take us out of our comfort zone and stretch our faith. We aren't just those who love God. We're also those called according to His purpose and that includes His command to make disciples and be His witnesses. That includes taking the risk of loving people even though they may not love us back. That includes forgiving people who hurt us deeply when what we want to do is make them pay for what they did to us. That includes sharing our faith with people who may reject us for what we believe. Paul will go on in verses 35-36 to declare that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ – and then lists things that believers were facing for witnessing about Jesus:

*Tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, for your sake, we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. (vs. 35-36)*

Hudson Taylor had definite convictions about how God's work should be done. He said we can make our best plans and try to carry them out in our own strength. Or we can make careful plans and ask God to bless them. "Yet another way of working is to begin with God; to ask His plans, and to offer ourselves to Him to carry out His purposes."

How is God inviting you to grow in His service in this season? How is God inviting you to step out of your comfort zone? How is God challenging your tendency to live selfishly? How is God encouraging you to

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use your gifts for His glory? Who is God nudging you to witness about Jesus to? As we close, bring that to God and with a risk-taking faith ask God to propel you to a new place, believing that it may be dangerous, it may be uncomfortable, it may be risky. But it will end well. It will be bent to good. By the God who is good and has your good in mind.

Let's pray.