

“The Promise of God’s Providence”

Romans 8:28

- INTRO. - ILL. – I heard about a man one time who was walking along a mountain road, and he came upon a native American (in full Indian attire) lying in the middle of the road with his ear pressed to the ground.

As he got near the Indian, he heard him speaking in broken English, “Truck. Chevy truck. Chevy pick-up truck. Large tires. Man driving. Large German Shepherd in front seat. Loaded with fire wood. California license plate UBH 123.”

He couldn’t believe it. He said to the Indian, “That’s amazing! You mean you can tell all that by listening to the ground?” The Indian said, “No, the truck ran over me 30 minutes ago.”

- APPL. – You and I are a lot like that Indian. We don’t always know what’s coming, and when it comes, it often just runs right over us.
- How often have you talked to someone, and asked them how they are doing, and they say to you, “Well, I’m doing alright *under* the circumstances.” My friend listen, God has not called us to live *under* our circumstances. He has called us to live *over* our circumstances – no matter what those circumstances may be.
- It is true we do *not* know what the future holds. But we know the One who holds the future! And that makes

all the difference in the world! God has promised us, that no matter what happens to us in this world, He will always cause it to turn out for our good and His glory.

- We are looking at one verse of Scripture this morning, and next to John 3:16, this verse might be the greatest promise for believers in all the Word of God. This one verse of Scripture will help you sleep at night when nothing else can.
- Look at it with me: (Rom. 8:28), “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.”
- God has made a wonderful promise specifically to His children – *not* to *everybody*, but to those who are His. And the promise is, that no matter how turbulent the flight might be, the plane will ultimately land safely. No matter how rough the sea might become, the ship will make it safely to shore (in an ultimate sense).
- And the pains we feel (which are expressed in our groanings) are alleviated by our understanding of the providence of God. The Bible clearly teaches us that *everything* that happens in the life of a believer, is under His divine control.
- Now, before we jump into this passage, I want to point out two things that I believe we tend to forget (as believers) that will help us with this doctrine of the providence of God.

- First of all, we need to recognize that *our* focus is usually on the *immediate*, while *God's* focus is on the *eternal*.
- We tend to view our lives as complex puzzles with many pieces. And as we try to put our lives together, we can easily become frustrated and confused, because we are (usually) only looking at just one or two pieces of the puzzle. So we can't see how the pieces fit together.
- In fact, we are so limited in our perspective, that we are unable to see what the final picture of our lives will look like. But God (in His omniscience and foreknowledge) knows exactly how all the pieces fit together for our greatest good and His greatest glory.
- But this difference in perspective is *why* certain things often seem out of place or uncalled for, but to God they are perfect for us, and they accomplish His eternal purpose like nothing else will.
- And we have to keep in mind that we are *not* able to see everything in this life the way He does. His ways are higher than our ways, and that is where faith comes into play. We have to trust His providence.
- And this leads us to a second thing that is very important when we consider the providence of God – and that is, we often *forget* that *our* knowledge is limited. We often think we know best, when we really don't.
- Sometimes (after a good deal of research and reflection) we can gain a fair understanding of the *past* and the *present*. But even *then*, our knowledge will always be subject to growth and correction.
- *Not* so with God! His knowledge is perfect and complete. He *not only* knows every detail of the *past* and the *present* with total accuracy, but He also knows everything about the *future*.
- Nothing can ever take Him by surprise, for “all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:13b)
- Has it ever occurred to you that nothing ever “occurs” to God? As Corrie Ten Boom once said, “There is never panic in heaven – only plans.” Nothing ever takes God by surprise!
- And as we probe more deeply into the subject of God's providence, we must understand that we cannot fully comprehend it. We are finite, and therefore we cannot understand the infinite knowledge of God.
- But the good news is, that God has revealed (through the Apostle Paul) these precious words of promise, that enable us to fully embrace (by faith) a complete confidence in His sovereign control. And as we look at Rom. 8:28 today, I want you to see five aspects of this great promise. First of all, notice:

I. THE CERTAINTY OF THIS PROMISE

- Notice the first three words here, “And we know.” These three simple words express the Christian’s absolute certainty of God’s providence. This is *not* conjecture or opinion – it is the unwavering Word of God.
- The Greek word for “know” (here) refers to the possession of absolute, unshakable confidence. This promise is *not* something we wish for or guess at – it is a truth in which we can have total assurance because it is given to us by God.
- While many in this world may lie, God cannot lie. If God put this in His Word, it cannot fail. Therefore we should embrace it and make it part of our every day lives. This is something that we can stand on – even when there are things that happen that we don’t understand. Even when there are those things that take place, that cause us to say, “I don’t see how in the world God could ever cause good to come from this.”
- And quite frankly folks, you and I are *not* always going to be able to reason out how *some* things could possibly work out for our good. There are times when things that happen in this life just don’t make sense to us. And we just need to know (ahead of time) that we will *not* always be able to reason things out, and see what God is doing when He allows certain things to happen in our lives.
- But the promise is certain – and the promise is absolute – in those times when we think that *even God*

cannot cause good to come from it – He always does. We may not always be able to see it, but we can always know He will keep His promise.

- Thomas Watson (an old Puritan) once said, “Where reason cannot wade, faith must swim.” This is a promise from God – and we *must* stand on it. We don’t have to *understand* it, but we must live on the basis of it.
- As someone said so well, “We must never doubt in the dark what God has promised us in the light!” So we see the certainty of this promise, but we also see:

II. THE CAUSE OF THIS PROMISE

- Look at the next phrase, “And we know that God causes...” Now, if you have the KJV, it reads like this, “And we know that all things work together for good...” Folks, listen, that translation is very misleading. It is *not things* that work together for good – it is **God** who works those things together for good.
- God is the One who brings order out of chaos, and harmony out of discord. Behind every circumstance is the providence of God.
- Do you know what the word “providence” means? It comes from two words – the word “pro” (meaning “before”) and the word “video” (meaning “to see”). Providence simply means “to see beforehand” and then to provide according to what is seen.

- Do you hear that word “provide” in the word “providence?” The providence of God simply means that God sees every event (before it occurs), and He provides for that event.
 - Now, note that this verse does *not* say, “God *causes* all things to occur.” God is *not* the direct source of every circumstance in our lives. We know from other biblical texts (for example) that God is *not* the cause of sin and evil.
 - Of course, we need to know that (in theological terms) there are *primary* and *secondary* causes. In the sense that God is absolutely sovereign, He can be seen as allowing all things, but He is *not* the direct cause of all things. (I’m *not* going to wade in those waters this morning because they are very deep...)
 - But what we need to see (here) is that God uses whatever means necessary to bring about His ultimate good. Rom. 8:28 teaches us that God uses whatever comes into our lives for our good. He uses whatever means are necessary to mold us into vessels of utmost beauty and grace.
 - He is the Potter and we are the clay – and He has the right to make us as He chooses – but we can always rest assured that what He is molding is always for our best. (Pause) Thirdly, notice:
- Let’s read on in that verse, “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good...” This verse does *not* say that God works things out for our good most of the time. It doesn’t say that He works *some* things out for our good. It doesn’t say that if we are lucky things will turn out good once in a while.
 - No, it says that God causes *all things* to work together for good. *Not* some things and *not* most of the time. All things and every time. We can always count on that, even when we can’t always see it.
 - Now, that is *not* to say that everything is good. We can’t say that everything that happens in this life is good, but we can always say that we are trusting God to bring good out of everything that happens.
 - I can remember (as a little boy) I used to watch as my mother would bake a cake. And I can remember that the ingredients she would put in there did *not* look too appetizing. I mean, who wants to eat flour, or baking powder, or a raw egg, or vanilla extract?
 - Ah, but I tell you what – when she mixed those ingredients together, and baked them in the oven (and especially when she put that icing on the top) I sure did like that cake!
 - And in the very same way, you and I are *not* going to like the ingredients that God puts into the recipe of our lives at times. And yet, we can always know, that when He is finished, there will be a Romans 8:28 cake.

III. THE COMPLETENESS OF THIS PROMISE

- ILL. – Listen, think about this! Did you know that every single day most Americans consume two deadly poisons? They are called sodium and chloride. Either one (taken alone) can kill you. But taken together they form sodium chloride – and the common name for that is table salt. Either one, without the other can poison you, but both together can bless you.
- That’s what God does with the circumstances in our lives (even those we see as evil and painful). That word “works” in v. 28 literally means “to work with.” In other words, God works with all the ingredients of this world to mix things together in such a way that something good comes out of it.
- God has the ability to reach into any box of circumstances and produce an absolute gourmet delight! In His omniscience and omnipotence, He can take any puzzle piece and fit it into our lives in such a way as to produce a masterpiece.
- Like cogs in an intricate piece of machinery, God “causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him.” Although we may *not* be able to see it *now*, we will one day understand, how every single piece of the puzzle has been fitted together in our lives perfectly by God.
- That phrase “to work together” is the Greek word “sunergeo,” from which is derived the English word “synergism.” That is the working together of various elements to produce an effect greater than (and often completely different from) the sum of each element acting separately.
- And please understand – Paul is *not* saying that God always prevents His children from experiencing things that can bring harm to them. Rather he is attesting to the promise of God – that He will take all those things that He allows to happen (even the worst of things) and turn them into that which will ultimately be a blessing.
- What does the word “good” mean? It refers *not only* to that which is good in this life, but that which is ultimately good in heaven. In other words, we don’t always see the good in this life, but we can be assured we will see it (one day) in eternity.
- Sometimes it may be adding to that future glory, but one thing we can always know – no matter what happens in our lives as His children, the providence of God is at work – bringing about the purposes of God – for our good and His glory.
- God’s providence is at work in our lives, for our *temporal*, as well as our *eternal* good. Sometimes it might be that of saving us *from* tragedies, and other times it may be taking us *through* them. But either way, His providence is at work. That is His promise.
- And part of the confidence we gain from this promise, is that God will *not* allow *anything* to cross our path, that will ultimately be to our detriment. The Lord is for

us, *not* against us. And He has promised to turn every circumstance of our lives into ultimate good.

- Now, very quickly, let me give you 5 categories that fall under this promise. First of all:

A. Sweet Things Work Together for Our Good

- Now, this one may be obvious, but those sweet things in life are used by God for our good. Thank God for the sweetness of a newborn baby, the love of a wife, the joy of friendship, the blessing of good health – all those things that we enjoy in this life – but we must *not* forget that these are things God uses for our good.
- The Bible says (in Rom. 2:4), “Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?” It is the riches of His kindness and His forbearance and patience that leads us to repentance and salvation.
- The Bible tells us that every good and perfect thing we enjoy in this life comes down from the Father of lights. He is the one who gives us these things, and these are all things that He uses to bring His good into our lives. Secondly:

B. Sorrowful Things Work Together for Our Good

- We know this from many accounts in Scripture, such as the story of Joseph. As I’m sure you know, Joseph experienced one sorrowful event after another. He was

rejected by his brothers and sold into slavery. He was falsely accused and put into prison. He was neglected by those who should have helped him. Although he was a man of integrity, yet he seemed to go from bad to worse.

- And yet, we know that in the end, he was elevated to the highest position imaginable. And after the story had finally unfolded, he gave testimony to his understanding of the providence of God in his life.
- In Gen. 50:20 he said, “And as for you (speaking to his brothers), you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.”
- You see, all the way back there (in the Book of Genesis) Joseph understood the principles of Rom. 8:28. All those “terrible” things that happened in Joseph’s life were (in reality) working together for good, to accomplish God’s plan and purpose for his life. (And there are many examples of this.)
- ILL. – Years ago I read a story about a Norwegian fisherman who was out fishing off the coast of Norway with his two sons. They were pulling the boat with their oars, quite a ways off the coast, when a horrible storm came up.

The clouds descended, the sky blackened, the lightning flashed, and the waves began to whip around that little boat. Eventually they lost sight of the shore. They had no compass and no direction – nothing to steer by.

They began to think they were going to perish. They had no clue where the shoreline was.

Then the youngest son said to his father, “Look dad!” And when they turned to look, there on the horizon they could see the pinpoint of yellow light. Their father said, “Steer for that light!” And he kept encouraging them, “Pull hard boys, there’s the shore.”

They turned the boat in the direction of the light and pulled the oars with every ounce of strength. As they got closer, the light got brighter and bigger. Then, after a while, they could make out the shoreline. Eventually they could see the harbor. Soon they were pulling to boat up to their very own dock.

As they were tying the boat off, the wife of the man came running down to the dock. She was crying, and she said, “Oh, something terrible has happened.” When the man asked what it was, she said, “Our house has burned to the ground. I couldn’t help it. I was cooking, and the skillet caught fire, and before I knew it the whole thing was going up in flames.”

She was so distraught -- until she learned, that if it were *not* for that fire, she would have lost her husband and her two sons. That terrible tragedy was the light that guided them home.

- My friend, you can always rest assured, that God (even now) is taking the tears and tragedies of your life – the trials and the tribulations – and working them together for good.

- You may *not* be able to see it clearly right now, and you might *not* (even) understand it fully in this life, but you can know this it is true – and one day you will see it clearly and unmistakably. One day you will know that God’s Word is true and trustworthy.

- Sweet things work together for our good. Sorrowful things work together for our good. But thirdly:

C. Satanic Things Work Together for Our Good

- What about those things the devil throws at us? Can God use those things for our good? Of course He can! Let me give you an example of how He does this.

- In 2 Cor. 12, God gave the Apostle Paul a vision of heaven that was so glorious, he couldn’t even adequately describe it. But because Paul had been given this incredible vision, he was in danger of falling into the trap of becoming prideful.

- So the Bible tells us (in 2 Cor. 12:7), “And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me-- to keep me from exalting myself!”

- The Lord causes *even* the messengers of Satan to work together for our good. God has the ability to turn *even the most evil things* into that is for our good.

- “Pastor, are you sure about that?” Well, let me ask you a question: “What is the most evil, satanic thing that has ever been done on the face of this earth? Is it not when the devil orchestrated for the Son of God to be nailed to a cruel Roman cross?” And yet, what did God do with that cross? He turned it into the instrument of our eternal salvation!
- Listen, the next time you doubt whether or *not* Rom. 8:28 is true, just take a look at the cross. God took the most evil work in the history of man, and turned it into the greatest event in the salvation of His elect.
- God took the old rugged cross and turned it into a bridge of eternal blessing. He took the shed blood of His only begotten Son, and turned it into a river of redemption.
- Sweet things work together for our good. Sorrowful things work together for our good. Satanic things work together for our good – but I’ll go a step further:

D. Sinful Things Work Together for Our Good

- Now, listen carefully, I didn’t say that sin is good – any more than I said Satan is good. But God has the ability to take that which is evil, and to cause His good to come from it.
- Even where there is sin, the Bible says, “where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” (Rom. 5:20) If a man sins he will suffer. If a man sins he will be

hurt. If a man sins it is a terrible tragedy. But God’s grace is able to overcome the consequences of sin.

- When Simon Peter cursed, and swore, and denied three times that he ever knew the Lord Jesus, the grace of God tenderly restored him. In fact, Jesus said to him, “Simon, I have prayed for you that your faith will not fail.” He also said to him, “Once you have turned, strengthen your brothers.”
- In other words, “Simon, what you did is bad. It’s terrible. But I know that your faith is real and therefore it will not fail. I know that you are going to repent, and then you will be able to become a rock for your brothers in Christ.”
- Isn’t it wonderful (and amazing) how God works to cause all things to work together for good? Yes, Peter suffered, and wept bitterly over his sin. He experienced what the author of Hebrews wrote in Heb. 12:11, “All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.”
- Even sinful things can be used by God for good in our lives. But finally notice:

E. Small Things Work Together for Our Good

- *Not only* do *sinful* things work together for good, but *simple* things do as well. And the point here is that we

experience the providence of God in even the smallest details of our lives.

- The Bible has a lot to say about small things. It declares to us the even the hairs on our head are numbered by God. The Bible tells us that He takes care of the flowers of the fields and the sparrows that fly through the air.
- And I won't belabor this point, but I believe we need to think in terms of every single detail of life being under His sovereign care. He cares about everything that happens in our lives.
- In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said that if God cares for the grass that is thrown in the furnace, how much more does He care for us. But we're almost out of time, so I won't be able to develop these last two points of our outline – but let me give them to you quickly:

IV. THE CONDITION OF THIS PROMISE

- Look at Rom. 8:28 again, “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called...”
- This promise is *not* automatic. There is a condition attached to it. It is only for those who love God and are the called of God. In other words, this promise is for genuine believers in Jesus only. If you are here today, and you have never received Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, this promise does *not* apply to you.

- As John MacArthur points out, ““Those who love God’ and ‘those who are called’ are two of the many titles or descriptions the New Testament uses to describe Christians. From the human perspective we are ‘those who love God,’ whereas from God’s perspective we are ‘those who are called’.”
- Are you a true “lover of God” today? Are you one who has been called by God? In other words, are you truly born again through faith in Jesus Christ? (Pause) Well, there is one last thing we see (here) about this promise. We see:

V. THE CONTEXT OF THIS PROMISE

- Look at it one more time: “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.”
- God does all things according to one singular purpose. And we are going to see in more detail what that purpose is next time, but we find it in v. 29, “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son...”
- My friend, everything God does in our lives as believers, is designed to accomplish one single purpose: To make us just like His Son Jesus Christ.
- And there is really only one test to determine if you truly love God and are called of Him. It is *not* whether

you come to Sunday School and church. It is *not* how many verses of the Bible you have memorized. It is *not* whether you don't smoke or chew or go with girls that do. There is only one test, and that is whether you are becoming more like Jesus Christ.

- That's it! God has one single purpose for us – and that is to conform us into the image of His beloved Son.
- MAKE APPEAL
- PRAYER