

The Good Side of History, Part 1—Romans 8:28—11/8/2020
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Today I'm preaching truths that I personally needed to meditate on.

After a worldwide shutdown for a virus & violent riots, this year also brought a divisive & untrustworthy election season.

Beyond all that, this has been a heavy year personally as last month my Dad went to be with the Lord after a long battle with Parkinson's.

I won't list other trials we've faced as a family or as a church or in our state or in our nation, but they are many.

So I pray that a return to a familiar promise will be timely for you as it has been for me to meditate on & pray over this week.

I want to remind us that in Christ we are on the good side of history, the side the good & sovereign God will work for good.

A catchy phrase lately is that we want to be on the right side of history, but that often doesn't reference to any transcendent standard.

The actual 'right' side of history can only be evaluated by the righteous standard of the Word of God.

But today I won't list & lament the continued nationwide corruption & all the wrong of this current era of history.

Today I just need some hope—I need God's Word to lift my downcast gaze up from the chaos & Romans 8:28 can help.

Though some demean this verse as a potentially trite, Pollyanna truism that doesn't really help when you are hurting, it is far from that.

It is a radical reorientation of passions & priorities to gain hope & help in the midst of whatever Christians face.

It has helped me fight anger, anxiety, bitterness, depression, coveting, greed, lust, laziness, pride, selfishness & more.

Romans 8:28 has been helpful to me when I've been slandered & betrayed & lied to & lied about & unjustly criticized & ungratefully griped about & maligned & mistreated.

Romans 8:28 has brought me hope when I had no answers for 'why' questions & when I could see nothing good in the circumstances I was facing & no light at the end of the dark tunnel & I wanted to give up.

Romans 8:28 has been a place of faith when there was no sight.

So when I hear that Romans 8:28 is like patting a child on the head & telling him that everything will be ok, my heart breaks over such mockery of God's promise and missing out on God's compassion.

Romans 8:28 is not that lie that wrongly says life will not be hard or that all bad things will stop at some point.

Romans 8:28 is all about a relationship with a Person who brings the most supreme security and persevering hope imaginable.

It does not say that everything will always work fine & dandy and it is also not fatalism or deism.

Romans 8:28 is instead about grace from the God who governs all laws and has a purpose in every action of every atom.

It is about a God who is both transcendent and personal, about a God who is both all-powerful and absolutely good.

Kids—you need to know this promise of Romans 8:28 because you will have times where people treat you really bad and you don't understand why they would do that.

Or you may want to follow Jesus & yet struggle against some sin & you may wonder why God doesn't just make it go away.

All of us may fear the results of last week's election & our nation's future & what it means for our fellowship or friendships or finances.

You may have health problems that just don't seem to go away and you battle with how to cope.

Or you may feel alone or cast out or mistreated or your life may actually be great and you worry it all may crash.

I can't think of a situation where Romans 8:28 cannot help us.

So I want to dig the foundation of this verse deep into your heart to anchor it far below the surface to prepare you to build your life on it through any storm that threatens you.

I want Romans 8:28 to stabilize and strengthen your life so securely that no matter what knocks you down, you can get up spiritually again and keep walking with God.

But for that to be true, you need to know the God we're talking about here—the God Paul is referencing as the biblical God.

So let's note a 1st point as we soak in the healing therapy of this verse—point #1 today—know where this promise starts.

As you approach this, 1st know where this promise starts.

This promise starts with God—you need to know that—this promise starts with the God of Scripture.

If you know the God of the Bible, the God Paul speaks of, then this promise makes automatic sense & should be patently obvious.

So it is not surprising that this verse begins by telling us that we know this—that Paul is going to say something that should be known by all who trust the God He is speaking of.

Romans 8:28 begins with the words, “And we know” to alert us that we should already all agree with what we're going to be told.

Have you ever asked WHY he says, “we know” to start this?

Since that start links it to the verses before it, let's look to our Bibles and read Romans 8:28 in its context—read Romans 8:24-28. [READ]

This section is about Christians having security that looks up & looks ahead, having perseverance that hopes in the unseen God & the unseen future He promises His people.

And it is a certain future with anchored assurance for believers first because God the Holy Spirit Himself prays for us.

The Spirit intercedes with God the Father as they cooperate in accomplishing the divine plan.

Since the Persons of the Trinity are always unified & work together, the Spirit's prayers are always answered & verse 28 is assured.

So we need to know this promise starts with a God who is far bigger than our minds can fathom & able to do far greater & wiser things than we are able to grasp fully.

The bigger & more accurate your view of God, the more compelling is His magnetism to attract you & His strength to anchor you.

And since God is the authority on God, to find out about Him, we must listen and receive what He has said in His Word.

The promise of Romans 8:28 starts with the God revealed in Scripture.

It does not start with a distant deistic god who created all things and then sat back to watch what happened with it all.

It starts with a God who is both Creator and Sustainer of it all, a God who is over it all and who is also involved with it all.

It does not start with a weak, needy god who reacts to it all.

God did not start some long evolutionary process & react to mutations along the way to try to direct things in the right way.

God is not uncertain of His next move and waiting to see how much power He'll have to extend in order to fix problems.

God does not sit there helpless with His mouth gaping open when tsunamis or earthquakes hit as if He lacked power or knowledge of it.

As Psalm 139 describes, God is ever-present everywhere & intimately acquainted with every detail of our existence & every micro- & macro-movement in time.

God knows all things actual & possible in the past, present & future.

Psalm 139 says God knows our hearts & thoughts & what we are going to say & everything about us everywhere we go.

Yet this God is not all- present and all-knowing in a helpless, reactionary way that anxiously wonders what to do next.

No. This God does what He wants & nothing happens that does not first pass through His filter to accomplish His purposes.

Psalm 115 speaks of God's sovereign & free exercise of power as He gets glory over all nations & does whatever He pleases.

Recall also this God eternally exists outside of time as Psalm 90:2 says to God, *"Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God."*

God is not changed by time nor does He change with time because He invented & created time & governs time & existed before time & continues to exist outside of time.

If that makes your mind spin, then you are beginning to grasp the greatness of the God with whom this promise starts.

And though God's original creation was very good, God had planned to renew a better creation out the one sin corrupted.

Yet He did not plan salvation because He was sitting around needy and lonely in heaven and wanted some company.

As Paul said in Acts 17:24-25, God is not confined to one temple or one nation or one galaxy and He did not create to make up some deficiency He had or to complete Himself or His happiness somehow.

He was and is and always will be totally self-sufficient.

Yet this God did come in the Person of Jesus Christ to display perfection and accomplish atonement for those who trust Him.

God did step down into creation to become one of us because He cares and He is by nature loving and freely giving.

So out of the overflow of His perfections, God loves and saves sinners and works for the good of His people all by His grace.

As Romans 1-3 makes clear, He came to save sinners all by His grace, not because of any merit or works or worth in us as sinners who all deserved to be punished in Hell forever.

But Romans 3-5 reveal that He freely forgives sin & counts sinners righteous if we trust in the Person & work of Jesus Christ for us.

In Christ, God went to the extreme to accomplish His good pleasure by going to the cross to pay for sin & rescue sinners.

Romans 5 says God has done the greater thing in reconciling His hostile enemies by sacrificing His own Son.

So God surely will spare no expense in working all things for good for those He has saved through Christ's death.

The true God is indescribably huge & yet also shockingly gracious.

So if you've heard or read Romans 8:28 & it has not brought you comfort & hope through whatever you face, then you probably need to step back and know where this promise starts.

You probably need to examine your view of God.

If you have a remote idea of who the God of the Bible is, then Romans 8:28 should be obvious.

That's why the verse begins with the words, "And we know."

That's point #1—know where this promise starts—it starts with the God of the Bible.

Behold your God and let Romans 8:28 expand your hope.

Yet some of you may still lack assurance or comfort here.

So we need to say next that one big obstacle to your hope and peace may be that this promise doesn't apply to you.

Or it may be better to say that it does not YET apply to you or you have somehow otherwise missed who it applies to.

So the next thing I want to be sure you grasp here is who this promise is for and that's our 2nd point from Romans 8:28 today.

#2—know who this promise is for as described in 2 ways.

Romans 8:28 does not apply to everyone.

It is not a blank check that all will finally end well for everyone as if every life is a fairy tale where they live happily ever after.

No. The verse clearly specifies who gets this assuring anchor.

And this is vital to the verse because the wording of the Greek text of the promise actually starts with who gets it.

The original manuscript literally begins by stating, "And we know that for those who love God."

This promise is for those who love God.

If you don't love God, then Romans 8:28 has probably never brought any encouragement to your heart.

The Bible does not say everything works good for everyone.

It does not say all things work together for good for people who go to church or who believe facts about Jesus or who know a biblical view of God and understand biblical theology.

This promise is for those who love God.

So there is no denying that if you have absolutely no love for God, then this promise is not for you or at least not YET for you.

The promise is for those who know God personally and long to know Him more deeply and want to take pleasure in Him and seek to honor Him and do what glorifies Him.

That's what this love is—it is a passion for God personally and a pursuit of God's ways practically.

If we love God, we love what God loves and hate what He hates and we will define good how God does.

Then we will grasp and treasure the good goal that He works all things together for us because we will view good as He views it.

Our hearts will be submitted to Him and aligned with Him in a way that our love for Him gladly rests in Romans 8:28.

Of course, I do not mean that any of us love God perfectly.

Please don't misunderstand me—I do not mean that this is easy or automatic or that there is no battle in the pursuit of loving God and applying His promises.

I do not mean that we need to love God perfectly or even love Him well in order to know rest in Romans 8:28.

The verse does not say how much or how consistently or give any quantitative or qualitative measure of that love.

But it does say is that it is for those who love God.

So the question is this—do you love the God of the Bible?

Do you have a love-relationship with the God revealed in Scripture?

Do you have desires & affections for God that you respond to Him & His Word with faith & joy & peace & obedience?

In other words, the question is this—are you a Christian?

That's really the issue here—a Christian loves God.

If you don't love God, then you won't want what God defines as good—which is ultimately Himself & His ways.

So it only makes sense that Romans 8:28 should give no comfort or hope to a person who does not love God.

I mean, if you don't want to grow closer to God because you don't really believe He is the most desirable object of your affections, then Romans 8:28 will not be precious to you.

So next we need to ask the question how we get love for God.

That's where the end of the verse comes into play to clear this up.

Those who love God are further defined at the end of the verse.

It is *“those who are called according to His purpose.”*

Matthew 22:14 is the only place in the NT where the word “called” refers to an outward call, a sound heard with your physical ears or read by your eyes about the Gospel.

That outward call does not have the same effect on every person.

Everyone who hears that kind of outward call does not respond to it and become a Christian.

Every other time in the NT that the noun “called” is used & also when the verb is used to describe Christians, it is referring to an inward call.

That inward call actually accomplishes something.

Read on after Romans 8:28 to see those who are called further defined in Romans 8:29-30—read Romans 8:29-30. [READ]

Those who are called are the same people who were predestined and also the same people who are justified and also the same people who are glorified.

Understand that there—all who are predestined are also all who are called and justified and glorified.

In other words, all those things are true of all Christians.

If you are truly a Christian, then you were predestined and called and you have been justified and you will be glorified.

To be called here means to be a Christian.

So our 2nd point from Romans 8:28 that we must know who this promise is for gives us 1 answer with 2 descriptions.

The answer is that this promise is for true Christians.

And a true Christian is (1) someone who loves God, and (2) someone who is called by God.

We know they are called by God because God is the one who calls us according to verse 30 that we just read.

Now think with me why it is important and encouraging to have this second description of Christians as those who get Romans 8:28.

What if the verse only said it was for those who love God?

How would that leave you feeling on days when your love for God was kind of weak and your walk with God had waned?

I'd be scared I would miss out on this promise that day.

I might gauge my assurance by how affectionate I felt toward God or how much good fruit of love I was producing that day.

But the description of Christian God-lovers as those who are called should keep us from that kind of uncertainty.

Here's why—if God is the one who calls us to be Christians and that is an inward call He works in our hearts and everyone He calls is also justified and glorified, then who is responsible for us being Christians?

God is, right?

If everyone God inwardly calls actually does come to faith in Christ and love God, then our hope here rests on God's initiative and God's work and God's faithfulness.

Then Romans 8:28 is about God's character, not mine or yours.

God has the final and decisive vote on anyone coming to Christ because He is the One who does this calling by His Spirit.

That is the biblical doctrine of God's effectual call.

Jesus put it this way in John 6:44, "*No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him.*"

1st Corinthians 2:14 says that no one can understand the things of God without the work of God's Spirit in them.

So this effectual call of God by the Spirit is necessary for a person to respond to the Gospel and come to Christ and be saved.

And when the Spirit's call happens inside a person, that person does come to Christ and nothing can stop him from coming.

That's why it's defined as God's effectual call—because it is always effective, it always accomplishes its intended effect.

Then that leads us to point #3, know why this promise is sure.

Point #3 from Romans 8:28—know why this promise is sure.

God's character & God's call make this promise sure, but the word "purpose" further deepens our assurance.

Read Romans 8:28 again. [READ]

You may note the pronoun "His" is in italics to show that it is not in the original Greek, but it is right to understand it there.

This is not our purpose or anyone else's purpose—it is the ultimate purpose and plan for the universe.

And therefore it is obviously and only God's purpose.

So God's goodness toward Christians in this promise is rooted in the sovereign, unwavering plan of God purposed from before time began.

Part of that purpose is to conform us to the image of His Son, as verse 29 says, & that is surely a good purpose He will fulfill.

And that's true security—if all you have is Christ, then rest in Him.

Stop worrying and simply rest in Him.

When Jesus is all you have, then you have all you need because He is the same God who is painting His plan for the ages on the canvas of history and He will finish what He started.

2nd Timothy 1:9 uses these two words—call and purpose—together in a way that sheds more light on this.

2nd Timothy 1:9 says God “*has saved us & called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose & grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.*”

God's saving us is equal to His calling us and that calling is not according to our works—it's not finally about us.

It is according to God's purpose and grace that He granted to us in Christ Jesus before time began.

When God planned what to do in time, He purposed to show grace in Christ to those whom the Spirit would effectually call.

That calling would be based on God's choice and God's call and God's grace and God's purpose, not on any human works at all.

That's the idea of God's purpose mentioned in Romans 8:28.

It is not something God hopes will happen or that God may change.

Of course, we need to understand that our prayers & real choices are included in God's purpose.

So this exalted, majestic, transcendent view of God's sovereign purpose does not mean we fail to pray or obey or take seriously the responsibilities & promises & commands He has given us.

Rather, all of that is included in God's purpose.

And when we have the desire or the knowledge or burden to pray or act or speak, we do so in faith that it does make a difference—that we are not fatalists—and that all of that is part of God's plan.

With all that included in & under the purpose of God, no greater depth of security can be imagined or invented.

God's purpose is anchored outside of time, outside of us, outside of creation, outside of anything except God Himself.

We could go to many verses to show this reality of God's sure purpose for His own glory, but let me just mention a few.

In Isaiah 46:9-11, God said, “*Remember the former things long past, For I am God, & there is no other; I am God, & there is no one like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, & from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, My purpose will be established, & I will accomplish all My good pleasure; Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it.*”

There is no one like God who alone declares the end from the beginning & establishes His purpose & accomplishes all He pleases & speaks & plans & is sure to bring it to pass & do it.

Psalm 135:6 says, “*Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps.*”

And the purpose that pleases God is what brings Himself glory.

Ephesians 1 says God works His plan to the praise of His glory & God's pursuit of His glory is an absolutely secure purpose.

Since God's purpose is secure, then His people are secure.

Since God is the ultimate worker in His people by His grace, then He is sure to finish the work He began as Philippians 1:6 puts it.

And then our hope and assurance for perseverance comes from the Person & promise & purpose of God.

We can take comfort in His effectual call that brought us to Christ and created love in us that puts us into His purpose in this promise.

Praise God for such gracious hope in such a wondrous promise!

I pray you know this marvelous and majestic God and are growing in the grace of the promise of Romans 8:28.

I pray you know where this promise starts, who this promise is for, & why this promise is sure.

Tonight we'll see what this promise includes & when it has worked & how it is proven.

If you do not know this promise is yours or how it can make a difference in your life, please come and talk with us after the service.

In the meantime, please seek Him in prayer & watch as we remember His great love shown to us in Jesus Christ as we remember Him in the ceremony of communion.

Jesus commanded us to take of the bread & the cup regularly together to keep His sacrifice of the cross ever before us.

We're reminded of His perfection & kindness & love to die as a substitute to pay sin's penalty for sinners like us.

And we're reminded that He rose again & secured all His promises for us for now & forever.

So we remember Him now & thank Him.

1st Corinthians 2:9 says, "*Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, And which have not entered the heart of man, All that God has prepared for those who love Him.*"

Bow & silently pray & thank Him for His love & ask Him to search your heart to remember Him as He deserves.

Pray alone quietly & then I'll lead us in prayer.