

**The Good Side of History, Part 2—Romans 8:28—11/8/2020**  
**Copyright by Mark Vaughan 11/2020**

This morning we began digging a deep foundation on which to build the life-anchoring promise of Romans 8:28 so let's read it. [READ]

When we serve the God of the Bible, we can run back to Him for hope & assurance that He does not waste anything.

Do you do that?—do you run back to Romans 8:28 & believe afresh that God is sovereign over every decision & that He is good?

When you look at situations in your life, are you tempted to doubt or despair over whether you made wrong decisions or prayed enough or acted wisely or somehow sinned?

Or you may be certain that you did sin & you only see the problems strewn along your path & feel like you are doomed for trouble.

Others may look back & mostly see sin or sins against you.

You see is how your life has been damaged or devastated by wickedness around you or by specific sins against you.

Or the hard times you face may not come from specific sins, but from broader troubles in society or natural disasters.

What about all that? How does it all relate to Romans 8:28?

Paul starts verse 28 saying basically if God is who the Bible says He is, then we should know and expect Romans 8:28.

The God revealed in Jesus Christ as the sacrificial Savior and righteous Redeemer will not fail to do good for His own.

The context of Romans 8 even says believers are adopted into God's family as His children to call Him, 'Abba' or Daddy.

All of those attributes and actions of God are what pour into the first 3 words where Paul says, "And we know."

So as a 1<sup>st</sup> point this morning, we noted we must know where this promise starts—it starts with the God of the Bible.

Then we made a 2<sup>nd</sup> point—know who this is for—by moving to the next 4 Greek words—the words translated, 'to those who love God.'

And lest we question this promise when our love is weak, we are reminded that our love FOR God comes FROM God.

Being called is the objective foundation & cause of us being saved & loving God & that calling is the 2<sup>nd</sup> description of who this is for.

So we saw (1) where this promise starts & (2) who this promise is for & then 3<sup>rd</sup>ly why this promise is sure.

This promise is sure from God's purpose planned before all eternity.

But when we speak of God doing all He pleases to fulfill His purpose, it raises questions about where evil fits into that.

Certainly the good & righteous God of the Bible does not approve of evil nor did He create evil or tempt anyone toward evil.

For example, James 1:13 says, "*Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.*"

And Psalm 5:4 says of God, "*You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; No evil dwells with You.*"

Similarly Ezekiel 33:11 says, "*'As I live!' declares the Lord God, 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live.'*"

Ezekiel 18:23 is similar to that verse in Ezekiel 33:11.

So as we talk about God's purposes being accomplished, we must also say that God does not approve of everything as good in itself as if God would call evil good.

Many other biblical passages also tell us that God does not like evil & God is not evil and He never does evil.

But here's the catch—in God's wisdom and greater goodness, God did allow evil and He even planned to allow evil.

So evil is part of God's ultimate plan & yet evil is not something God Himself created or authored.

How God did that is beyond my full comprehension & that's one of are many attributes & abilities of God that are beyond my full grasp.

But the Bible is clear that God does not author evil and does not approve of evil.

And the Bible is equally clear that everything that happens is part of His perfect, sovereign plan.

God is big enough and good enough to plan to allow evil and yet always be totally good and holy and untainted by evil.

The massive God of the Bible gives far better comfort and hope because he is the true God big enough to really be called God.

And if you struggle to fully grasp the biblical God in a way that fits in your mind without any tension, welcome to the club.

Finite human minds cannot fathom the fullness of God and His ways that are higher than our ways, as Isaiah 55:9 puts it.

So we should let God be God & bow the knee to trust Him—and then we can be amazed that all the greatness of this God is lovingly directed toward our good if we are His.

As we submit to Him in faith like that, we will find the joy and rest of certainty and security in His promises.

We will know where the promise of Romans 8:28 starts, who it is for, and why it is sure.

Then we will be ready 4<sup>th</sup>ly, to know what it includes.

Point #4 from Romans 8:28: know what this promise includes.

What we've said about God and His ultimate sovereign purpose sets the foundation for us understanding this point.

If you have the NASB translation like I do, then your version says 'God causes all things to work together for good.'

If you have the ESV or KJV or New King James, yours says 'all things work together for good' & if you have NIV, yours says, "In all things, God works for the good."

The differences arise because some very old manuscripts state that God works all things—God is the clear subject in those.

But most manuscripts, even old ones, do not have the word for God.

Those manuscripts can be translated that "HE works all things together" or that "all things work together".

But the meaning does not change between any of the readings.

Whether it is that "all things work together" or that "He [meaning God] works all things together" or that "God causes all things to work together", it has the same meaning.

God is the Cause of all things working together for good—God is in charge of it all as the sovereign & ultimate cause.

So let's ask—exactly what does God work together for good?

The verse says “All things”—which means not merely some things, not only good things, not merely macro-movements of history, & not just the stuff of super-spiritual people's lives.

This includes ALL things—good & bad, righteous & wicked, holy & evil, cultivated & chaotic, purposeful & senseless.

Again, that does not mean God loves or delights in the bad, wicked, evil, chaotic or seemingly senseless.

God hates evil with a greater, more holy passion than anyone and that's why He promises to punish sin.

God hates & opposes evil so seriously & righteously that He will pour out holy wrath upon it forever in the fires of Hell.

And He also hates & opposes evil so seriously & righteously that He crushed His Son for the just penalty that evil deserves.

But God is also so great that He purposed to allow evil so He could overcome it & turn it all together for good.

God is so powerful, wise, supreme, good, & caring that He can actually mix ALL things together to bring forth good results.

Puritan pastor Thomas Watson explained God working together all things like making medicine by saying that, “*This expression ‘work together’ refers to medicine. Several poisonous ingredients put together, being tempered by the skill of the apothecary, make a sovereign medicine, and work together for the good of the patient. So all God's providences, being divinely tempered and sanctified, work together for the best to the saints.*” [All Things for Good, p.11]

That well illustrates a vital point about the word Paul uses for work together—all things do not merely work for good because that would imply that somehow there is good in the evil itself.

But there is no good to be found in wickedness of any kind.

So do not try to tell the victim of abuse or the grieving survivor of a dead loved one that the abuse or murder or death is good.

Death is part of the curse of sin—it is not good in itself.

Jesus Himself wept over the death of His friend Lazarus because He saw the sadness and despair it brings to people.

Similarly, we should weep with those who weep and not say that death or sin or disasters or health problems are good.

So let's be clear that this promise does not include all things as good, but that it includes all things working together for good.

Whatever trial or uncertainty you face or whatever evil has been done to you or whatever tragedy you have experienced, please know that God does not look upon that and call it good.

No. He calls it bad and Hebrews 4:15 says Jesus sympathizes with our weaknesses in temptation and trials.

But God does something far greater than merely empathize & something far different from calling evil good—He causes the tragedy & evil & all else to work together for the good of His people.

God lovingly mixes it all together to form the perfect healing medicine & training regimen for those He has made His.

So to know what this promise includes, you need to know that God's promise to bring good even includes Him bringing good out of evil.

This promise of God includes even the torture & martyr of Christians, even every terrorist bombing & horrendous crime & government scandal & natural disaster & everything else.

To illustrate God's sovereignty over evil, note a few more verses to affirm that God really does plan to allow evil & then turn it for good.

Write down 1<sup>st</sup> Kings 22 to read later how God uses what must be a demon to bring His plan for His glory in Israel.

The divine author of 1<sup>st</sup> Kings 22:23 even plainly states that God put a deceiving spirit into the mouths of King Ahab's prophets.

So the Bible teaches God was in charge of the deceiving spirit & the evil that the deceiving spirit did & caused & yet God did not author or create sin in or from the demon.

You can also look up Amos 3:6 later to see God explain that no calamity occurs in a city unless the Lord has done it.

Amos 3:6 says that calamity or natural disaster does not occur in a city unless the Lord does it.

So the Bible teaches that God is in charge of what specific sins happen and what general tragedies happen.

But the Bible also teaches that He has a good purpose for His glory and the good of His people through every bit of it.

God is sovereign over evil—He planned it, allowed it, and always overrules it and overturns it and will finally judge and punish it.

Therefore, this promise really includes ALL things.

And look back in Romans 8 to see the context of suffering in fallen, corrupt world that is crying out to be set free.

Verse 17 of Romans 8 mentions suffering & being glorified with Christ and then read verses 18-23. [READ]

The ultimate good that will come for everyone who loves God is that we will enjoy the glory that is far beyond comparison.

That promise of verse 18 is confirmed by the reality that the corrupt creation also groans for future glory for Christians.

So in the context of this chapter, there is no doubt that the promise of Romans 8:28 is especially for those who suffer and who cast their hope upward in God and forward to His future.

But whether you receive and enjoy this promise boils down to whether you trust your authority or His.

Isn't that the issue—either God knows best or we do, right?

And He is the Source of all good and He is the loving, faithful, gracious God revealed to us in Christ.

So Romans 8:28 calls us to trust the God who knows best and to run to Him for hope that is anchored all in His grace in Christ.

For those who do so, Romans 8:28 is an all-inclusive promise that God causes all things to work together for our good.

That means that whatever has happened to you or your loved one or your stuff or life or whatever YOU have done to wreck things or whatever else—it all works together for your good.

If you love God and are called according to His purpose, you can view all the water that has passed under the bridge of your life as working together for your good.

This is not 'don't worry, be happy,' mindless karma & it's not a reggae mantra that every little thing is gonna' be alright.

Instead this is rock solid assurance of actual good in the final analysis that is actuated & assured by God Himself.

Read what comes after verse 28 through verse 38. [READ]

Romans 8:28 leads to the assurance that nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We are tempted to limit God only to the good things and to exclude Him from being sovereign over sin and suffering.

Yet the context both before this promise in verses 18-23 & after it in verses 35-39 address all kinds of sin and suffering.

So surely this promise includes—as it clearly says—ALL things, including all that is unexplainably tragic or undeniably wicked.

As we say that, we need to recall that because of sin, all humans deserve far worse than any natural earthly catastrophe.

All of us as sinners deserve the terror of God's wrath in Hell.

So it is not wrong of God to plan and use such things for His good purposes for His people.

Though God never excuses or authors sin or calls evil good, He does mix all things together into His perfect brew of precious ointment to apply healing help to the lives of His children.

The Puritan pastor Thomas Watson wrote, "*God is a skilful Physician. He knows what is best. God observes the different temperaments of men, and knows what will work most effectually. Some are of a more sweet disposition, and are drawn by mercy. Others are more rugged and knotty pieces; these God deals with in a more forcible way. ... God does not deal alike with all; ... God is a faithful Physician, and therefore will turn all to the best. If God does not give you that which you like, He will give you that which you need. A physician does not so much study to please the taste of the patient, as to cure his disease. We complain that very sore trials lie upon us; let us remember God is our Physician, therefore He labours rather to heal us than to humour us. God's dealings with His children, though they are sharp, yet they are safe, and in order to cure.*" [All Things for Good, p.52-53]

Here's the point—God is never sovereign without also being good and He is never good without also being sovereign.

God is never in charge without at the same time being trustworthy & good & He is never good-intentioned without being all-powerful.

And His goodness and sovereignty have a pinpoint-accuracy aim to channel all things to a good goal for those He calls.

So I want us to want the good that God promises and I don't want us to be disappointed or distracted by wrong ideas of what good might be.

That leads us to the 5<sup>th</sup> overall point in our study of Romans 8:28—point #5 we must know when this promise has worked.

In order to paint some pictures of what this good looks like, we'll take a tour through the Bible of some times when this promise has worked.

We'll start with Job as the oldest since Job probably lived around Abraham's time, well over 4000 years ago.

Read Job 1:6-12 where God pointed Job out Satan. [READ]

God initiated this & then God give Satan freedom to kill all Job's oxen & donkeys & sheep & servants & camels & kids.

Then read verses 20-22 of Job 1. [READ]

Job did not sin in what he said and yet he said that God is the one who took away all his livestock and his precious children.

Then God pointed Job out to Satan again and Job's health was so horribly hit that he suffered unspeakable misery.

And read Job 2:9-10 to see how he responded. [READ]

Again, Job did not sin when he said that God brought both the good he received and the adversity, which is literally the word for bad or evil.

So Job did not sin when he pointed to God as the ultimate sovereign ruler over every detail of his horrible circumstances.

Yet he maintained faith in this great God also as the source of all good.

And God did bring greater good out of all this as we see if we turn to the story's end in chapter 42—read Job 42:1-5. [READ]

After all Job's conversations and complaints, he confessed how this humbled him and exalted God.

You can read the whole chapter later to see how God honored Job before his friends & blessed him more than before.

But first and foremost we see God's goodness in Job's expanded view of God and humbled view of himself.

In verse 5 there Job says he had heard of God, but now he saw.

Job had been a blameless, upright, God-fearing, holy man and yet his experience of the reality of God in his life was so much deeper and fuller after his suffering that it was like he saw God.

Do you want to know God is real in your life?

Do you want assurance of Him saving you and keeping you?

Do you want the real experience of His promises & His Spirit?

Then believe Romans 8:28 and embrace the hard times He brings—submit to His sovereign wisdom and grasp His good designs.

If our lives are all happy-go-lucky, take-it-easy, we miss how rewarding it is to feel our need for God & see His faithfulness.

It is through the troubles of life that we see God as real and active in our lives and gain assurance of His grace to us.

I don't mean we see visions or have God appear or that we hear Him apart from His Word, but His presence and promises come alive.

That's why passages like James 1 and 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1 tell us to rejoice when we face all kinds of trials—because our faith is proven and we gain encouragement through them.

Listen to 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:6-9: *“In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.”*

Do you want abounding love for God & assurance of heaven?

Then trust Him in situations where you can't see Him at work.

Trust Him for good when you can't see the good.

Then you can come through the trial with renewed reality of God like Job experienced through his suffering and like Peter promised.

And that kind of intimate assurance from God is GOOD.

So Job's story reminds us that God causes all things to work together for God's definition of good, a goodness that leads us to God Himself.

Since God's good goal is our salvation and sanctification and glorification, it is good when He purges us of sin and proves our faith through trial and perseveres us to the end.

Whatever brings us to God and deepens our relationship with God is good and whatever keeps us in the faith until we reach heaven is good.

As we seek the good of Romans 8:28, let's recall that the true essence of good is God Himself & whatever draws us to Him.

Next turn to Genesis 45 and let's recall the story of Joseph when was his father's favorite & was hated by his brothers.

So Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery and lied to their father & Joseph went all alone to Egypt & became a slave in the house of an Egyptian officer named Potiphar.

Though he prospered there, Potiphar's wife lusted after him and lied about him and got him unjustly sent to jail.

Yet he prospered in prison & yet he was forgotten by Pharaoh's chief cupbearer after rightly interpreting a dream for him.

Then after 17 years away from home, Joseph was remembered by the cupbearer and brought to interpret a dream by Pharaoh.

When he did so, he was rewarded by becoming second only to Pharaoh in charge of all food in the land to prepare for famine.

The famine stretched beyond Egypt to Canaan where Joseph's family lived and so his father Jacob sent there for help.

Joseph recognized his brothers, sent food for them & then later welcomed his whole family to Egypt to provide for them.

Genesis 37-50 is the story & Psalm 105:17 says God sent Joseph to Egypt but look at Genesis 45:7 for the God-centered point of it all as Joseph explained God's plan for it all. [READ]

If you have read the story, you might want to remind Joseph that his brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt & God did not send him there.

But that's just the point—God did send Joseph by using the evil jealousy and murderous hatred of his brothers.

And God did that for the good of Joseph and also for the good of Joseph's family and also for the good of many people beyond Israel.

Then as Joseph's brothers feared his wrath after their father's death, he modeled faith-filled forgiveness that flows from trusting Romans 8:28.

Turn over to Genesis 50:19-20 to see that. [READ]

Of all the evil done to Joseph, he knew that God was the ultimate cause behind it all working out His good plan.

Genesis 50:20 says God MEANT it for good—that is Romans 8:28 in the OT—that God was working all things together for good for Joseph and his family as those called according to God's purpose.

That was another time the promise of Romans 8:28 worked.

And we could look at other examples in the Bible when this promise has worked like the story of Esther.

One thing you'll find is that the good that God brought was usually not merely for one person.

2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 1 promises that God comforts us in our afflictions so that we will be able to comfort others in any affliction they face.

God's help in hard times for us is transferable as help to others.

So we need to let God's definition of good for us reach beyond ourselves to those we may care for in the future.

God's purpose for Joseph's trials touched all of his family and his nation and the entire known world at that time.

Similarly, we need to remember that God's good plans may stretch beyond us so that our trials are spreading His goodness far beyond us.

Job helped us define good in relationship with God and Joseph helped us define good in relationship with others.

Now let the Apostle Paul define good in relation to ourselves as we see one more time when this promise has worked.

Turn to 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 12 where Paul was defending his apostleship because the Corinthian church was being led astray by self-proclaimed super-apostles who were attacking Paul.

After boasting in all his sufferings and persecutions at the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 11, he began chapter 12 by mentioning a trip he had to heaven to see what he could not even repeat.

Yet because of Paul's spiritual privileges, read 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 12:7-10 to see how God loved Paul enough not to allow Paul to become proud—2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 12:7-10. [READ]

This may more likely be translated as a stake to his flesh, meaning a stake someone is impaled upon rather than a tiny thorn.

And this stake is clearly stated to be a messenger of Satan, which is literally an angel of Satan, what we call a demon.

The demon was probably the one causing all kinds of problems in the Corinthian church by assaulting Paul's character & credentials.

But God had a good purpose for this pain that Paul pointed out twice in verse 7—to keep Paul from exalting himself.

To continually humble Paul, he experienced heart-wrenching opposition in a church he loved dearly.

And verses 9-10 add that God did this to teach Paul that God's grace is always more than sufficient and that even Paul still needed to trust in God's strength and not his own.

So God was working through demonic opposition in the church to bring good results in Paul's heart and life and approach to ministry.

God was humbling Paul and pouring out His sufficient grace and proving Himself powerful when Paul felt only weakness.

That is a definition of what God considers good for His people.

It may not be what we dream of as good, but it is a picture of the good promise when the promise of Romans 8:28 worked.

God's sovereign goodness & sufficient grace worked for Paul even when he prayed for this to go away and for the pain to end and for the heartache to be over and for some rest to come.

Even when God said, 'No,' to Paul's request, He was all the time saying 'Yes,' to His good work in Paul.

If we need trials to be sanctified, to love God more and to be fooled by the world less, then God will do that for our good.

But always, we must see God as our good and loving Father who is training us as His children as Hebrews 12 puts it.

God is not punishing His children through our trials—He is lovingly training us to keep us on the path to heaven.

He captures our hearts again and again by cutting us off from false loves and by pulling us away from dangerous idolatries.

We could list a number of God's designs for our good, but we must see that all such designs are not to remove from us what is good.

They are to bring us to fuller experience of God's true goodness and to expand our joy in helping others do the same.

We would not want our dream-life to come true if it would turn into a ferocious nightmare that would crash and burn in Hell.



So we trust what God brings is better than our foolish fantasies.

God knows better and He is calling us to trust Him and cling to Him through all His wise plans & many of you have stories of this too.

But finally note the greatest time when God worked all things—even evil things—together for the good of those who love Him.

Turn to Acts 4:27-28 to see God's predestined purpose in the cross accomplished through the sins of numerous people.

We'll note this as a 6<sup>th</sup> and final point about Romans 8:28—this answers the how question—how this promise is proven.

Read Acts 4:27-28 to see the ultimate proof of God's sovereign power & loving goodness at the cross—Acts 4:27-28. [READ]

Herod, Pilate, the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel were all gathered together against Jesus and it seemed like He was all alone.

Nothing good was found in the hearts of all those people who worked against God appearing here as the only innocent Man.

Yet all those people accomplished exactly the purpose God predestined in the death of His Son as the sacrifice for sinners.

And therein we find the greatest proof that God causes all things to work together for good for His beloved children.

To know how this promise is proven, we must always return to the cross as the fountain and foundation of our faith.

If you want proof of Romans 8:28, look at the cross.

God loves you—look at the cross—He sent Jesus to DIE for you.

If you are a Christian, God is not punishing you.

He already punished Christ instead.

He loves you and He has designed the perfect training regimen of His loving care for you.

He is working His sanctifying good providence in your life purely because He loves you and wants what is truly best for you.

Believe Him! Embrace His good, wise, loving sovereignty in whatever you face.

Don't reject His gracious rule! Don't run from His healing hands!

Fall into His arms and let Him carry you and shape you in the ways that are for your greatest good—for your joy and hope and assurance and holiness and fruitfulness.

Trust the God of Romans 8:28 because He is the God who accomplished perfect justice and infinite mercy at the cross.

He took the vilest evil and the most twisted tragedy at the cross and brought forth the greatest good and the happiest heaven.

So why would we ever doubt Him?

Why would you ever want to run your life your own way?

Turn from sin to faith in this glorious God today and be saved and continually sanctified and be securely kept until you are glorified.

Love this gracious God who is ours through the work of Christ & ever grow to love and trust Him as the fount of all goodness.

Bow with me and let's close in prayer.