

Sunday, July 5

Andy preached on the theme, “He Who Promises is Faithful.” It followed up on the Sunday school lesson about the consequences of faithlessness. His scriptures came from several sections of Hebrews: 10:19-25 and 32-39, 11:1-2, and 12:1-3 and 12-13.

Andy told a story about a British journal’s contest that offered a prize to whoever submitted the best definition of a friend. Among the entries: “Someone who multiplies joy and divides grief” and “Someone who understands our silence.” The winner: “The one who comes in when the whole world has gone out.” He said that comes closest to Proverbs 17:17: “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.”

Reviewing Galatians 5:22-23, Andy said the fruit of the Spirit should be evident in our lives so that others will call us faithful. In modern times, individualism has won the hearts of people. People move on from friendships if they don’t benefit them or marriages if they aren’t working. But friendship is costly. This week, as we celebrate 250 years as a nation, the world needs to see the obedience of our lives lived out in faithfulness to God.

Here, Andy shared a story about a woman who went to see a psychologist for anxiety and depression. Since she was late, a pastor offered her a ride, but stopped at the hospital to visit someone. She also visited someone she knew and arrived at the psychologist’s office excited. He told the woman that acts of service were a way she could address her problem.

“Our lives are not fulfilling when we focus on ourselves,” Andy said. “It’s found in serving others. Great motivation is found in God’s faithfulness to us. Hebrews 10:23 (says) we are called to be faithful because God is faithful to us. He didn’t need to do it; He chose to do it. He decided to set the world in motion and then tied Himself to us.

The God who created the universe and every situation of our lives is the God we can call on for help. Not only is that incredible, Andy said, we should never take that for granted. After reviewing the faithlessness of Israel and our own messes, he said God is able to work in spite of our mistakes and make something beautiful out of it.

To know God is to know the freedom of living with a purpose and a direction, Andy said. We are called to be faithful because of our rich heritage—the saints who have gone before us.

“In a world of individual values, broken promises, and shattered connections, we can keep our promises because God keeps His promises to us,” he said.

Sunday, July 12

Pastor Steve resumed his Romans series with a look at Romans 8:26-30, the basis of his sermon “FOR Our Good.” He said there are four major themes in verse 28, which he will be covering for three weeks: 1) The verse is about Christians—“those who love God,” 2) “And we know” has to do with faith and understanding, 3) All things work together, 4) For good.

“This verse is written for Christians,” Steve said. “It’s a message of hope. Those who love God are those who are called according to His purpose. Those two things tell me this is a verse for Christians. This is about those who are called according to His purpose.”

He noted that a lot of theologians call verse 30—about calling, justification, and glorification—the “chain of redemption.” Glorification is what we receive when we get a new, glorified body in heaven. But Paul talks about it as if it were already so. In the mind of God, those who are called by Christ are already glorified, which Steve said is worth shouting about.

Believers are also described as those who love God. Yet, while many grew up in church and are supposed to love God, it’s often easier to say that than do it. He said many Christians struggle, even though they know all the trials, tribulations, and circumstances will work for their good.

Steve said he came to an awareness of the reality of God’s love during a youth group meeting. “I came to an understanding that all this is real,” he said. “The Bible stories are real. Jesus did come to earth. The reality hit me: Jesus is for real. He loves you and died for you. After that, nobody had to ‘guilt’ me into loving the Bible and coming to church. I wondered why we didn’t have services every single day.”

For examples of God’s love, he cited Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Matthew 22:36-39, where Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 in answering a Pharisee’s question about the greatest commandment. Steve said the reason we observe Communion every Sunday is because it reminds us what Jesus did for us. After quoting Joshua 24:23 and its instruction to incline your heart toward God, he commented on how nobody had to tell him to think about his wife while they were dating. He also mentioned Colossians 3:1-2 and its instruction to set our minds on things above.

While we won’t always have the feelings for God as intensely as early in our walk, like marriage our relationship with the Lord will mature and grow. Our recognition of God and His love should deepen in our heart. For anyone struggling, Steve suggested praying simply, “Take my heart; take and fill it.”

Sunday, July 19

Today’s sermon, “For Our Good Part II,” came from Romans 8:28. Today Pastor Steve focused on the first three words: “And we know.” He said that was a bit ironic since Paul had just told us the Holy Spirit intercedes for us because we don’t know how to pray. But verse 28 assumes we do know some things, even though much of our experience is wondering why something is going on or why it’s happening.

“How do I get the words off the page and make them make sense?” he asked. “How much of you have desperately sought God or opened your Bible, hoping some glorious light would come out of it? How many of you have quit your walk with God? Why are you still here? Because God is still at work in the lives of His people.”

The Lord doesn’t let us go when things are going on or when we’re struggling with guilt over not praying enough, reading our Bible enough, or working for God enough. Steve said the trouble with such thinking is that it puts the focus on self, which is a trick of the devil. The truth is we can never do enough to please God or earn our salvation.

At the beginning of verse 28, Paul is saying that we know God is doing so because it’s a knowing of faith. God has done something and you know He is working all things for good in the lives of His children, Steve said. Here, he read John 4:42, where

the Samaritans believed in Jesus because they had seen and heard Him; and 1 John 5:20, where the apostle wrote that we know Christ is true.

“We know Him and He has given us understanding,” Steve said. “It’s the same faith Abraham had when he prepared to sacrifice Isaac. God is at work in the lives of His people, and you know it. God is working in broken lives, in families, new babies, and sickness. He’s working through all of it for your good.”

Another biblical reason we can know this is found in Romans 8:15, which talks about us receiving the Spirit of adoption as God’s sons. The Holy Spirit is the one who sustains us and is the reason we haven’t quit on our faith. He resides in us and has poured His Spirit into our hearts. Because we’re His, we won’t go away. We can say that God is at work even through tears, frustrations, and disappointments.

“He’s at work in the lives of His children,” Steve said. “Because He’s in your heart, that’s how we can say, ‘And I know.’ Feelings say, ‘I don’t know’ (but) faith kicks in and says, ‘You do know.’”

Sunday, July 26

Today was part 3 of “For Our Good” from Romans 8:28. Today, Pastor Steve focused on all things working together for good for God’s children. After asking, “What are all things?”, he went back to verse 18, where Paul says present-day sufferings will not be worth comparing to the glory God will reveal to us. That is significant, since few of us have suffered the persecution the apostle did, such as betrayal, stoning, and shipwrecks.

“Most of us in this country can get an ‘attaboy’ for being a Christian,” Steve said. “It’s less than it used to be, but it’s nothing like those in Iran (suffer). All of suffering works together for your good.”

He said suffering: 1) is proof of being used for God’s glory, 2) will be used for God’s glory, 3) delivery from suffering can be used to comfort others, 4) works in us an incomprehensible weight of glory. It can also mean things like boredom, restlessness, and minor inconveniences, like long lines at Walmart or rude people in public.

“That is still working for God’s glory,” he said. “Hangnails or IKEA furniture . . . all these things are included in God working a greater glory in us. Working them together for good—for your good. For those who are called. If you are a Christian, God is at work in these things for your good. Because He loves you, He is working for your good.”

Since the King of the universe has you in mind, Steve said our gaze should be fixed on Jesus, who is working for our good. God has us running spiritual wind sprints, knowing it’s necessary for His children to go through difficulties and training. If we know it’s true that the King of Kings is working for our good, then we can do whatever He calls us to do.

Steve said he looks at Romans 8 as a crescendo in Paul’s verbal musical, ending with the final words of verse 31: “If God is for us, who can be against us?” That is really good news; it means Satan is not in charge and neither are we. God is, and no matter how many dumb things we have done, we can confess our sins to Him and ask for His grace. As we are growing in Christ, we should continue to look more like Jesus.

He recommended we feed constantly on God’s Word by reading it, memorizing it, and talking about it. If verse 28 says God is working for our good, what that says is we

need to get into the Book to find out what He's saying: "Read your Bible and pray every day."