

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

July 20, 2008

Romans 8:28-30 (New International Version)

More Than Conquerors

28And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him,^[a] who^[b] have been called according to his purpose. **29**For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. **30**And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

How's your day going? Great, I hope. Yet I know that is not true for everyone, and sooner or later something unpleasant will happen for each of you. Troubles come to everybody. Life is full of difficulties and disappointments. Christians, however, are positive people. God makes us so. He holds out the hope and encouragement in His Word that He is good, both for our daily, physical lives and spiritually. Today He assures us

IT WILL ALL WORK OUT

- I. God directs each day for your good v28
- II. God planned eternally for your good v29-30

Be assured that it will all work out because God directs each day for your good. I recognize that life doesn't always appear that way. Sin brought troubles into the world, all kinds of them. We know well the warning God had issued about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the midst of the Garden of Eden: "The day you eat of it you will surely die." While spiritual and eternal death were the foremost tragic results, Adam and Eve's act of disobedience set in motion the physical dying process that affects us all: aging, including the illnesses, aches and pains we experience. The created world was affected, too. Work became difficult, so that we sweat and feel fatigued by it, sometimes with meager results. Storms and floods cause devastation.

Sinful people bring troubles. Sin disrupts relationships. On the grand scale, war results. We see sin's presence in crimes like abuse, robbery, and dishonesty. Some rather horrid events make the news broadcasts. Enemies of Christ take action against believers. Even fellow Christians can become obnoxious when they are led by Satan into selfish, unthinking, unkind treatment of others. We get ourselves into trouble by foolish and sinful, destructive behavior.

Despite all of the bad stuff that happens, God is in charge. He shows it as He limits the trouble that comes into our lives. We often admit, "It could be worse." That is true, much so. The Lord's angels shield us from a lot of bad things that never end up coming our way. Just think what could have happened to you already this morning: your house didn't burn down while you were in bed, you didn't get electrocuted plugging in the toaster, you didn't have an accident on the way to church, your car didn't explode, nobody has bombed our place of worship. The list could go on. Much of that care we take for granted.

When trouble does occur, God redirects it in the interest of our soul and our spiritual well-being. The example of Joseph comes to mind. In their hatred toward him, Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery. In Egypt he ended up in jail because of the lies of Potiphar's wife. After an eventual reunion with his family and the death of their father, his brothers sent the message, "Dad said you should forgive us." Joseph's response was, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." Using the ability God gave him to interpret the Pharaoh's dreams, Joseph had advised and led actions to save food during good years and be prepared for the later famine. Many people owed their lives to that circumstance, including his own family. Or I think of how the early Christians in Jerusalem were persecuted. Many fled to other areas. They took the gospel with them and what started as trouble resulted in the expansion of the church. You can likely recount personal examples of similar results. We don't always know now what good God is accomplishing. We cling to His promises in faith even when the evidence of good is not visible. God has spoken and He does not lie.

Note that these words bring a special promise for believers, for "those who love him." Unbelievers have no such comfort. Use these words when you are feeling down. I am reminded of Asaph, the

author of Psalm 73. He was dejected, feeling sorry for himself and even envious of unbelievers. From his vantage point, they were getting ahead and enjoying the good life. His thinking changed when he entered the house of the Lord and considered eternal matters. In his positive conclusion he noted that the Lord had never abandoned him. Rather He had blessed him and would continue to do so throughout his life. In fact, God was the only one so reliable. Earthly sources do not always come through. They may help for a while, but at some point they will fail us.

The assertion of the Apostle Paul is true for each of us. Trust God, even when you don't see the evidence of His goodness. Cling to His promises. I have repeated these words at times when my heart was breaking and my eyes overflowed with tears, such as when I was informing my parents and father-in-law of one miscarriage after another in the early years of our marriage. It was hard to accept then, but those tears were followed by the repeated joy of announcing arrivals of children when God blessed us with a family. But what if that had never happened? Then our loving heavenly Father would have had other plans that were also good ones. Even when you experience an accident, layoff from work, or serious illness, it does not negate the positive truth of Paul's words, "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him." He never stops watching over us or guiding and blessing us. We can look at each day with an upbeat attitude. Wake up in the morning with the question, "What good does God have planned for me today?" Through even the storm clouds, keep your eyes on Jesus and know it will all work out. God directs each day for your good.

II.

We know that because of the bigger picture that the Apostle describes. God planned eternally for our good. He first formed a plan. The Apostle said that God foreknew us. He had more than awareness of our future existence. He knew us with love that singled us out to be His own. We might compare it to Israel's position as God's chosen people. They didn't even exist, but He formed them as a nation because He had plans for them. He was going to bring His Son into the world through them. So it was with us. God looked at us and loved us, not based on who we were or what we had done, since we weren't around yet. Elsewhere the Bible identifies what prompted the choice: it was "according to his good pleasure and will." It was God's doing entirely.

"Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers." God's plan and purpose had an object. He wanted us in His family, to be like His Son, beloved and holy. He wanted us to belong to Him in faith. The term "firstborn" is used in Scripture not about creation but in reference to resurrection from the dead. It is an assurance that we live because He does.

There is only one direction that the Bible talks about predestination, and that is to salvation. Paul was speaking to believers about believers, to give us assurance. There is no mention of unbelievers. They reject the Savior and bear the responsibility for their condemnation.

God carried out the plan He had made in eternity. "Those he predestined, he also called." God has called us by the gospel out of the darkness of unbelief and sin. As He directed your life He saw to it that you came into contact with his gospel. Perhaps your parents brought you to Jesus from little on, bringing you to baptism, teaching you of your Savior's love, worshiping the Lord together as a family at home and church, providing Christian education. Others came to faith later in life. Maybe a spouse patiently witnessed and lived his or her faith. Or a friend invited you. Some were misled and knew some but not the whole truth about the true God and His work, or you were exposed to Christian teaching but didn't really care much about it. Then you were brought to a closer and clearer understanding of His Word. God's call was effective. He overcame your natural rejection and the Spirit planted faith in your heart.

"Those he called, he also justified." That's a key word both in the epistle to the Romans and in Christian teaching. To justify is to pronounce righteous and holy. We know we were not holy in ourselves. We were born in sin and show it every day as we mistreat others, pursue selfish desires, and neglect God. That's why Jesus came into our world. He lived the perfect life that God's law required. He did it as the substitute for us. His holiness is on our record. Jesus took care of our sins. He paid for them with His suffering and death on the cross. With sins gone and holiness covering us, God looks at us and pronounces us holy in His sight. That's how we are justified. It all happens through Jesus.

He did it for the whole world, but it is no good to us if it is unknown. The Lord brought us into the personal relationship of faith by the power and work of the Holy Spirit through the gospel in word and sacrament, as we noted before. You trust Jesus as your personal Savior.

God has also glorified us. That is the result of being justified. We are welcome in God's heaven, where we will share a glorified existence. He will make sure we get there as He keeps us in faith. The love which God had for us in eternity continues for eternity. You can be absolutely sure. God's love does not change like human love often does. How many couples haven't vowed to love each other until death but have broken that vow?

The Lord provides some glimpses of our glorified state as we strive to live to His glory in thankful love to Him. We have a growing conformity to His likeness. As we speak to others about our faith and joy in knowing Jesus, we see it vividly before us. Our faith increases through Bible study, and thus our hold on glory. We enjoy a warm fellowship with the Savior and His people. As we worship together and sing God's praises, we have a foretaste of heaven. Jesus comes to us in His supper with the assurance of glory and intimate fellowship with Him.

Because He did all that (foreknew, predestined, called, justified, and glorified us), we can see why the first part of the text is true, that He directs our days for good. God wants us in His heaven. He will take care of us until we get there. As He carried out His plans in sending Jesus to redeem the world, so He has plans for you. Your life is not an accident. Live in confidence. Challenging circumstances and obstacles may tower over us. Do not despair. God overcomes even what seems insurmountable for us. He will not always do what we want or the way we want it, but it will be for our good, to preserve us in faith and bring us to heavenly glory.

May God grant you assurance through His Word, joy in believing, and eager anticipation of your eternal future. It will all work out, both in your life and eternally.