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Romans 8:28-30

GOD HAS TAKEN CARE OF EVERYTHING

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“Pastor, if God really loves me, why do so many bad things happen in my life? Does God really have a purpose in my life? If so, what is it?” I’m certainly not the first pastor to be asked those questions and I certainly won’t be the last. I’ve not only been asked those questions at times, I’ve asked them myself. We live in a world that often goes by Murphy’s Law. If anything could possibly go wrong, it will! And often at the worst possible time!

There are many people out there that say that life has no purpose at all. It is just a long series of events that are randomly connected. People feel very insignificant as they live in a world of billions of people. They wonder if there is a God at all, and if there is, whether God really cares about them. As Christians we know that life is not lived theoretically. We live in the concrete realities of everyday life, and it is not always pretty. We are confronted daily with situations that test our beliefs. We know that the testing will, at times, lead to doubt. We are subjected to all kinds of minor irritations. The airline lost our luggage. The car needs five hundred dollars of repairs. We stand in long lines wherever we go. We get a cold that we just can’t shake for months. Then there are bigger problems. We don’t get that job promotion we were counting on. In fact, we lose our job and have to go looking for another one. Our money runs out too quickly. Credit card bills start mounting up. We find ourselves getting deeper and deeper in debt. Our investments stagnate or even lose money. We start to worry about retirement. We lose more and more loved ones to death. We get older and our bodies are wracked with little pains and sometimes bigger ones. We wonder, “Why me, Lord?” Maybe we’re joking, maybe we’re not.

We may think that God is punishing us for doing something wrong. Or we may think that God has simply forgotten us. These are not new thoughts. They go back to the very beginning of the human race. As long as there is sin in this world, Satan will try his utmost to convince us that God does not care about us and that he certainly won’t deliver us from all our problems. Those were certainly very real thoughts for the people in Rome in the first century. Paul knows how the human mind works. He meets this reasoning head on. He assures us that GOD HAS TAKEN CARE OF EVERYTHING. He planned my salvation, He secured my salvation, and He works everything for my good.

How important are you to God? You are so important that God planned your salvation even before he created the universe. Let that sink in for a moment! “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.” Paul is going to use five consecutive verbs to assure you of the depths of God’s love for each of you individually. Foreknew, predestined, called, justified, glorified!

God foreknew you! Before God began the creating process by the power of his almighty Word, we are told that God foreknew us. He had an intimate knowledge of who you are and what you would be. You were an object of his love and his divine grace. This was not our doing. It was all God’s doing. Paul spells it out more fully in his letter to the Ephesians: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.

God predestined you for his family. He chose you from eternity. This was not because you were or are so lovable. It is because God is love. St. John says, "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. We love because he first loved us." His goal in choosing us was to bring us into conformity with Christ. He wanted us to share in the boundless blessings that are now the rightful possession of Christ. In bringing us into his family, in making us the children of God, the Father honored Christ, the Son of God, by giving him many brothers and sisters. In the family of God, Christ always remains the firstborn. We remember his resurrection. He was the first to conquer death. We, his brothers and sisters, will surely follow.

"And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified." Now Paul talks about how God came to each of us individually. First of all, he called us. How did he do that? He did that through the Means of Grace, the gospel in Word and Sacrament. He would bring us to faith so that we could believe all his precious promises and become part of his family. He would bring us out of the unbelieving world by working the miracle of faith in us. Once again, this is all God's doing. Our natural spiritual condition is not a good one. We are spiritually blind to truth, dead in our sins and enemies of God. We wanted nothing to do with him. The Holy Spirit would work through the Gospel to turn our hearts to faith. For many, perhaps even most of us, that came when we were infants. The Holy Spirit worked faith in our hearts through the washing of water and the Word in Holy Baptism. We don't ever remember a time when we weren't Christians. For others, that may have come later in our lives. We heard the Gospel message somewhere: from a friend, in a sermon, in an adult information class. Faith was begun and it grew. We were baptized later, confirming what God had done in us.

We were justified. That word is a courtroom term. It means to be declared "Not guilty!" We know our sins. Our sins had separated us from God and there was nothing that we could do about it. Our sins convicted us before a just and a holy God. We had sinned in our thoughts, our words, and our actions. We needed someone who could take our sins away. We needed someone who could remove the evidence that convicted us. That someone was God's own Son, Jesus Christ. His love would lead him to come into this world and become one of us. He would put himself under the same law the convicted and condemned us. He would stand in solidarity with us. He would live the life that we could not live. He would offer up that life as a sacrifice for the sin of the world.

On a hill outside of the city of Jerusalem almost 2000 years ago, Jesus took all our sins upon himself and died on an instrument of torture known as the cross. All our sins were nailed to that cross with him. He stayed there until every last sin was paid for. He died and his body was placed into a grave. He kept his promise that he would rise from the dead and destroy the power of death forever. His resurrection is the guarantee that God has accepted his Son's sacrifice for the sin of the world. All our sins are gone, wiped away forever. Since Jesus has removed all the evidence by taking our sins upon himself, and since we are given Christ's perfect righteousness, God cannot convict us of our sins. The only verdict that a just God can pronounce upon us is a verdict of "Not guilty!" God no longer sees our sins. They have been taken away by our Savior.

The final step is glorification. We need to constantly remind ourselves of what we will have in the future. We will have perfect, glorified bodies. We will live in a world where there is no more pain and suffering. We will live in a world where we will be reunited with our loved ones who have gone before us. We will live in a world where we will no longer be touched by the effects of sin and death. We will live with our Lord Jesus Christ forever. We who groan with the present sufferings of life look forward with certainty to that final glory that will be revealed in us.

Some of that glory is ours now. We are cleansed from sin. We are God's adopted children and heirs. We grow in our faith and serve God with our lives. But the full and final realization of that glory will come either when we die or

when our Lord Jesus returns to judge the world, whichever comes first. But we can speak of it as ours now because what God has promised is as good as done.

Knowing all that, we have even greater news. “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” This is one of those passages that you should have marked in your Bibles. Underline it! Highlight it! Memorize it! And refer to it often! There are no accidents in your life as far as God is concerned. Whenever bad things happen in our lives, God will work through these things so that they serve our good. We don’t always know what God has in mind.

In my former congregation a little child was born. He had a rare disease that demanded that his blood be taken and cleansed outside of his body. I remember going to the hospital and seeing a heartbreaking sight as he was hooked up to about forty different machines. I baptized him and visited him for weeks. There were many times when I had tears in my eyes as I looked at him and his parents. They grew in their faith and trust in God and so did many others as they prayed every day for him. He did recover and he called me a couple of years ago and asked if I would do his wedding. How could I say “No?” He is now married and a father of two children.

There was a young man named Joseph who was sold into slavery in Egypt by his brothers. Joseph had to endure many hardships including time in prison. Even when Joseph did the right things by resisting the advances of Potiphar’s wife, things seemed to go badly. But God had a plan. Joseph would rise in prominence, becoming second in command in all of Egypt. He would store food for an upcoming famine. He would save many lives, including the lives of his brothers who had sold him into slavery. Most importantly, it would guarantee that the Messiah would be born many years later. Joseph would tell his brothers, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”

Paul knew full well the truth of these words. He would undergo many difficulties after he had met the risen Lord on the way to Damascus and became his apostle to the Gentiles. Yet he knew that he was never alone. Jesus was with him and would bless his efforts. He knew that there was a crown of life waiting for him and all believers.

We don’t always know exactly what God has in mind for us. He may take us in a totally different direction than what we think is best. Sometimes we might see his purpose immediately, sometimes much later and sometimes we won’t see it this side of heaven. But his purpose will be accomplished. He will be there to strengthen our faith and bring us closer to him. God has taken care of everything. Thanks be to God! AMEN.