

The Unstoppable for-you-ness of God

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[0 : 00] Well, the goal of this sermon is to convince you from the Bible that God wants and will, he wants to take all of your mistakes, all of your suffering and all of your sin and make it serve an amazing, ultimate good.

And so I have a mistake then that I have to confess to you this morning is that I actually sent Thomas the wrong text to read before the sermon. So I'm going to trust that God will take that mistake and use that text, Romans 8, 1-17, to bless some of you here today.

And now I'm going to read for us the proper text, which is Romans 8, 28-30. So feel free to turn there now if you have a Bible or a phone with you.

Romans 8, 28, 29, and 30. And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined, he also called.

[1 : 21] And those whom he called, he also justified. And those whom he justified, he also glorified. This is the word of the Lord.

And God put Romans 8, 28-30 in the Bible. I'm convinced to comfort broken, messed up people like us and to make our lives just buzz with significance and with meaning.

Now normally in a sermon, I would kind of write an introduction that has a story or some sort of little anecdote to try to draw you in. But honestly, this text is just so good.

It's so rich. I just want to get into it. So I've kind of scratched out some of my intro material. There were just three verses, 28, 29, and 30. And so there's three points.

Point number one, God makes evil serve good. Point number two, your good is glorious. And three, nothing can stop you.

[2 : 24] So let's dive right in and look at verse 28 one more time. We know, love that certainty, and we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good.

For those who are called, according to his purpose, all things work together for good. Now here's why that's so hard to believe is because we want to look at our lives and put our finger on one bad and trace it to one good.

We want to be able to say, you know, we look back in our sorrows from last year and say, oh, now I know why God let that happen to me. God let this horrible thing happen, or he let me make this mistake so that this good thing would happen.

Now it all makes sense. Wouldn't that be nice if that's how God worked from our perspective? But that's not usually God's way.

And I think it's better God's way. Paul says in this verse that all things, plural, all things work together for good singular.

[3 : 38] God has a purpose for you. It's not something vague, it's not something foggy, but it's an ultimate good that is concrete that's real and it's glorious.

And his means of getting you to that ultimate good is by bending all things in your life around to meet that one glorious end.

So we can't put our finger necessarily on one sorrow in life and trace it to one good and say, now it was worth it. It's as if all the sorrows, sins, sadnesses and mistakes of our life are all bound together, worked together toward this one glorious end.

So for instance, all things includes our mistakes when you've sent the wrong sermon text to the pastor.

When you've bitten off more, you can chew in life and you feel overwhelmed like you can't get out. You've made a foolish decision with money and you find yourself in kind of financial troubles.

[4 : 52] It's hard to make ends meet. Proverbs 3.6 says that God will make straight our path. It doesn't say that God takes us off a bad path and puts us on a good path.

God takes that road you're on and straightens it in front of you. All things includes your mistakes. All things includes your suffering. When you're experiencing the brokenness of the world in your own body sometimes, in your mind, in your circumstances, when things are just hard, when you're weary, the death of a loved one, sickness, disability.

Romans 8.18, the verse after what Thomas finished reading for us this morning, says, the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to the glory that is to be revealed to us. So all things includes your suffering and the good that God has for you far outweighs the suffering that you experience now, even the most horrible things that have happened to you.

[6 : 17] All things work together for good. And all things includes our sin. You might say, but what if I've done something really terrible?

God won't use this horrible thing I've done for my good. Some of us have kind of a general sense of sinfulness. Some of us who are Christians will kind of walk through life feeling vaguely sinful and kind of asking the Lord to help sanctify us and make us more like Jesus.

That's fine. And some of us though may have like one glaring sin in your life, just one or two things, that thing that you're most ashamed of, that thing that makes you feel the most unworthy, the most dirty, all things includes those things too.

The very place in your heart where you feel most powerless over your sin is the very place that God wants to touch with his cleansing power.

It's not the place he avoids. God's not scared of that spot. Now this verse helps us avoid two big mistakes in our thinking about, particularly about sin.

[7 : 49] So the first mistake that we can avoid is this mistake. It's to say, my sin's just not really a big deal. It's small sins, white lies.

I can manage my sin and God's going to work it for good anyway. Well, it's a big deal. Well Romans 828 says, for those who love God, all things work together for good.

And a casual, flippant attitude towards sin is the exact opposite of loving God.

Calling yourself a Christian while making truces with your sin is like calling yourself a husband while cheating on your wife.

And if you're making truces with your sin today, here's what you can do right now. Decide by God's grace with God's help to go to war against your sins.

[8 : 56] To stop being casual, to stop being flippant and do battle, but God's grace, go back to your first love and entrust all of your sins to Christ's mercy.

So if you fall into the first mistake, and sometimes we do, the mistake of thinking, my sin's just not that big of a deal, you need to know that your sin is so serious that only the blood of the Son of God can restore you to the God whom your sin has offended.

So that's the first mistake that Romans 828 helps us avoid. The second mistake is to think, oh, my sin is so big. It's so nasty.

It's so offensive to God. I'm too far gone. There's really no hope for me.

If that's you, please hear this. Your sin cannot defeat Jesus. Over and over again, the New Testament makes it really clear.

[10 : 11] On the cross, Jesus defeated sin and Satan. It was a move of battle. It was war on the cross.

Sin and Satan just don't stand a chance against King Jesus. Romans 8 begins, verse 1, by reminding us of the complete and total power of Jesus over sin by saying, Romans 8, 1, there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

No condemnation. None. There is no evil done by us or to us that will not bend around on itself by God's power to serve our good.

By way of illustration, there's a little town in Germany, I think, called Wunsiedl. And for years, the citizens of Wunsiedl were annually terrorized by a neo-Nazi group that would come and do an annual march through their town.

It was like a parade of terror. People would shutter the windows. They would stay off the streets. And they would just hope and pray that no violence would erupt this time.

[11 : 35] But in 2014, some local businesses and charities, they took matters into their own hands and they organized a secret walk-a-thon. I love this.

They raised money. They took pledges so that for every meter the neo-Nazis marched through their town, 10 euros would be donated to an organization which helped people escape far-right extremist groups, just like the one that was terrorizing them.

So that year, instead of shuttering their windows and staying off the streets, citizens of Wunsiedl turned out in droves to cheer these neo-Nazis on as they marched.

They gave them bananas and water bottles and they cheered and waved. And at the end, they marched across a sign on the street which said, thank you for raising 10,000 euros.

Every step that was intended to terrorize served the exact opposite purpose instead. And that is what God does to our evil.

[12 : 43] We know that God has this kind of power over evil, because of one moment in history particularly, and that is the crucifixion of Jesus.

It's the cross. The worst evil to ever occur in history was the crucifixion of the Son of God and the greatest good that could ever possibly occur in history is that same moment.

And if God can make the death of Jesus the vehicle which brings us the glory of resurrection and eternity with God, what chance does our sin and suffering have against his power?

What chance? So that's point number one. Point number two, your good is glorious. Let's read verse 29 again.

For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

[13 : 53] Now I wonder what you think of as good for you. Like what's good for you in your minds? Some of us will think of financial freedom. That's good.

Right? We need to not be under the burdens of debt. Some of us will think of comfort. Some of us will think of health, vitality, a lack of conflict in our relationships.

Those are all good things. But none of them are the kind of eternally good with a capital G good that Paul has in mind here.

He's not talking about momentary good or partial good or limited good. Paul is talking about ultimate good.

It's the sort of good that's in Genesis 1 when God looks out on the creation that he's made beautifully and says, it's good, deeply, radiantly good.

[14 : 54] There's a good like that in store for you. Now in verses 28, 29, and 30, there's what I like to think of as a Bible sandwich going on.

I think I mentioned sandwiches in my last sermon too for different reasons. I might be hungry.

There's a Bible sandwich. So verses 28 and 30 are the bread. Verse 29 is the meat.

So verse 28 says, all things work together for good. Verse 30 says, your future is to be glorified.

Those are the pieces of bread. And in the middle, verse 29, conformed to the image of his son.

Verse 28 makes us ask the question, what is the good?

Verse 30, the other slice of bread makes us ask the question, what is glorious? Verse 29 right in the middle gives us the answer. Here's what's good. Here's what's glorious.

[15 : 53] See to the image of Jesus, forever is our ultimate good. That's the logic of these verses.

Notice the word for in verse 29. That for means that verse 29 is supporting and explaining the argument made in verse 28. Let me read it again.

And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good. For those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined.

Why? What's the purpose? To be conformed to the image of his son in order that he, Jesus, might be the first born among many brothers.

God is taking every mistake, every ounce of suffering, every sin. He's picking up, picking it all up in his mighty hands.

[16 : 53] And he's bending it around to make you into the sort of everlasting human who looks like Jesus.

Paul says we have been glorified. It's almost shocking that word, glorified. Isn't glorified a Jesus word?

Jesus is glorified. That seems too big of a word for people like us. But Paul is saying that our eternal future is to be glorious.

We will be conformed to the image of the Son of God. Wow. He doesn't mean that we're going to look like a Nazarene carpenter from 2000 years ago.

We'll look more like Jesus at his transfiguration, just glowing with holiness, the holiness of God.

[17 : 53] That's what he means. But when I look at the sin in my life, when I take just a moment of introspection, I can hardly believe that's true of me.

I mean, how many of you can take a good look at yourselves and then say, yep, I'm going to glow with the holiness of God one day, I'm definitely on that path.

But that's the whole point. That's why God is showing us in verse 28 that our sins, mistakes, and sorrows, they don't keep us from our glorious future.

They are shaped into that glorious future. Romans 8.29 is perspective giving.

It gives us a glimpse of God's purpose for us. God is giving us purpose. You know what the devil's terrified of?

[18 : 47] It's a church full of justified sinners with a glorious Jesus fueled sense of purpose. We're going somewhere and our destination is to be holy like Jesus forever.

That's a purpose to live for. And that's what God is doing in all his people by his might. God is making our evil serve our ultimate good of being like Jesus forever.

And here's the best part is nothing can stop him. Nothing. That's point number three. If we were to ask Paul and say, hey, the apostle Paul, that all sounds really good.

It sounds a little too good to be true though. How certain is that future? Isn't it a bit precarious?

Here's Paul's answer in verse 30. Those whom he predestined, he also called. And those whom he called, he also justified.

[19 : 56] And those whom he justified, he also glorified. It's eternally certain. Now, I wonder what your story of coming to Jesus is.

All of us who follow Jesus have a story, whether we knew a day when we decisively followed Jesus and put our life in his hands, or whether it was a gradual thing and you grew up and never knew a day when you didn't follow Jesus.

We all have a story. Verse 30 is our conversion story as Christians, but told from God's perspective instead of from our perspective.

This is your conversion story if you're a Christian. So my perspective, then personally, is I grew up in a Christian home. When I was 19, I submitted to Jesus as my Lord.

And for the last 14 years or so, I've been growing in Christ and just kind of stumbling my way forward with him each day. That's my perspective.

[20 : 58] God's perspective, foreknown and predestined, called, justified, glorified.

God is actually the subject of every verb in verse 30, grammatically speaking, because the emphasis is not on what we do in coming to Christ.

The emphasis is on what God has done. He foreknew and predestined. That speaks of God's activity and eternity past.

He looked into the future and he knew you intimately and he set his love on you. And he determined your destiny to be conformed to the image of Christ.

Not because of anything he forced all that you would do, but because of his own goodness. Called.

He called you. Now we're talking not about eternity past, but about our experience of coming to Christ.

[21 : 59] And Paul doesn't say, out of those whom he called, some decided to respond and he justified those ones. That's not what Paul says. No, he says, those whom he called, he also justified.

No one has ever or will ever slipped through the cracks between God's calling someone and God's justifying them by the atoning for their sins on the cross.

No one has slipped through those cracks. Because when Paul speaks about God's call, that very specific word that he's using means the same thing as when God calls creation into existence from nothing in Genesis.

Theologians call that the fiat command. God is the God who commands things to be and they are.

So for instance, in Romans 4:17, Paul says that God quote, gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

[23 : 09] That's what kind of called you are as a Christian. You're a new creation in Christ. He has called you into existence with his son.

So from our perspective, we decided to follow Jesus with our own free choice. Didn't we? From God's perspective, he called us and he justified us.

In other words, here's the truth from the Bible. Whether we can wrap our minds fully around it or not is that our free choice to follow Jesus is the vehicle of God's fiat command.

In other words, God ordained your free choice to follow Jesus. And I don't understand it, but I love it.

What a relief. I mean, who would have chosen him if not for that? If left to ourselves, we don't pick God.

[24 : 11] We need God's help to incline our hearts toward him. So God is the subject of all those verbs and here's why that's such good news because your future, your ultimate glorious good doesn't depend on you.

What a relief. God has a purpose for you. Verse 28, God has a destiny for you. Verse 29, God has determined it for you.

God called you into the new creation existence in Christ. God justified you by sending Jesus to die for the sins that you should have died for. And God glorified you by conforming you to the image of Jesus.

Now wait a minute. Glorification isn't that in the future. Shouldn't it read, those whom he justified, he will also glorify. Doesn't that make more sense?

But it says he glorified in the past. Here's how certain your future is, your glorious good.

[25 : 22] It's so certain that Paul talks about your future in the past tense. Jesus said on the cross, it is finished.

The death and resurrection of Jesus completed God's purposes for you with total, absolute certainty.

If you belong to Jesus, your glorious future to be conformed perfectly to the image of Christ is inevitable.

Nothing can stop him. And he's using all your mistakes, all of your suffering, all of your sin to serve that glorious purpose.

Amazing. We don't deserve that. In closing, it seems fitting to just read the rest of Romans 8 as a response.

[26 : 27] So let me read from Romans 8 verses 31 to 39 and then we'll close. What then shall we say to these things?

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all? How will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It's God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died more than that who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or danger or nakedness or danger or sword?

As it is written, for your sake, we are being killed all the day long. We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. No. In all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

[27 : 39] For I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen. Let me pray for us. Holy Father, we've heard you say that you work all things together for good for those who love you.

We've heard you speak of the certainty of your love and of our future and then we look at our lives and think, I don't see it.

I don't get it. It doesn't seem to jive. We're just asking you together now for the audacity to believe you, to put our feet down on your word, on your promise, on the goodness of your character and the certainty of your intention for us and just take the next steps with you.

Please help us to do battle with our sins that we've made truces with and please help us to not cower in front of the sins that we're terrified of but to take them all to you, to lean on you and your goodness and your mercy and your forgiveness and your compassion.

[29 : 10] Please make us to look like Jesus for your glory. Amen. We're going to sing now, sing some one four five.

Of course it will be played here versus one to nine and please do sing behind your masks if you're comfortable with that. Let's do that now.

I will exalt you all my love and fame, forever I will raise your holy name.

I will exalt your name forevermore, day after day your praise I will proclaim.

Praise is the Lord most worthy of all praise, His greatness none can search for complete heaven, each generation will recount your deeds, unto the next your mighty eyes, amen.

[30 : 48] Praise the splendor of your majesty, the power of all our summers that you have done, and you will let it bathe upon your days, and your majesty, God's sight will make known.

They will rejoice in your benevolence, and you're a abundant, Christmas celebrate, the righteousness that you have shown to them, praise and joy, something will relays.

The Lord is gracious and compassionate, He is close to anger, rich in steadfast love, the Lord is good to all that He has made, and merciful to all that He has done.

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.