



THE TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Light of the Valley Lutheran Church

God Works All Things for My Salvation

Romans 8:28-30 (NIV84)

²⁸ 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. 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.

Make no mistake about. What we have here is one of the greatest, if not the greatest truth, in all of Scripture. “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (verse 28) I can’t tell you how many times I have either quoted this to people or how many times I have reflected on this verse. It’s such an incredibly great promise that never gets exhausted. If you don’t have Romans 8:28 memorized, then I humbly suggest you make that a priority over the coming week.

As great of a promise and statement that Romans 8:28 is, there is that side of us, though, that steps back, looks in on our lives or other situations we know and think to ourselves, “I know that is what God says, but sometimes I have a really hard time believing it.” We get hung up on the fact that God says he works all things for our good, thinking that everything that happens to us must then be good. But you know, and life experience has taught you, that not everything in life is good. That observation is no different now than it was some 2000 years ago when Paul wrote this letter.

Paul was writing to people in a day and age when it was rough to be a Christian. They were a very small minority, and they were persecuted. Already in the short history of the Christian church, there were martyrs. James, the brother of John, was put to death with the sword by King Herod. Stephen was stoned to death by the Jews as he declared the truth of who Jesus was – Savior and Lord of the world. Many Christians were arrested – some of them multiple times – for testifying about Christ. They were hunted and killed, and around the time that Paul wrote this letter, the Emperor Nero, that great Christian persecutor who would blame the Christians for the problems in the Roman world, who would burn them alive at the stake, who would feed them to lions - he was taking over the Roman Empire. If the people hadn’t already seen Nero’s wrath against Christianity by the time they received this letter, they soon would. Add these situations on to the everyday problems that individuals faced, and you can see why someone would really start to wonder if God indeed works all things for the good of those who love him.

Don’t we wonder the same things? We know people who have had too many bad things happen to them over and over and over again without ever giving them a break or letting them collect their thoughts. A person gets fired for inexplicable reasons. They apply everywhere looking for more work, but application after application is rejected. Interviews do not pan out, even though they looked hopeful. Funds are dwindling. It’s a struggle to put food on the table week to week. The third and final notices start coming in on the bills. They can’t afford to go to the hospital to get medical treatments because there isn’t any insurance to draw on. Month after month of this continues. The situation, no matter how much effort is given, does not improve. They’ve prayed and prayed and prayed. They’ve continued to come to church week after week. The pastor has counseled them time and time again. It simply does not get any better. The nagging question that the person doesn’t really want to voice out loud because they know that they will instantly feel guilty for questioning God is “How can these things possibly be working for my good?” Maybe that’s your life right now.

Job loss. Health issues. Stress. Insecurity. These are all effects of sin. They are bad things that we are going through. We feel like we are drowning in a series of bad events with no end in sight. We know the promise of Romans 8:28, but we doubt it. We don’t believe it because the bad is so overwhelming.

Before we go further, let’s just admit that bad things happen to good people. Yes, it goes against our sense of fairness. Yes, it frustrates us. Yes, it has the potential to make us want to give up on God.

Here’s the deal, though. There is no such thing as karma – the idea that the universe has this rule that good is always rewarded with good and evil is repaid with evil. There is no such thing as fate in that no matter what you do, you will have to go through things and nothing can change your life. These philosophies were created premised on the idea that there the God of the Bible is not real. Karma, fate – these are made up ideas about our future.

These may be made up, but God is real. And the real God says that, “in all things [I] work for the good of those who love [me].” (verse 28) This real God has always kept his Word 100% of the time. Even though we may fail to realize it, fail to see it played out in our lifetimes, God says that it is true. God works with all things that come into our lives – good and bad - with one goal in mind: to bring us to our salvation. He works all things so that our lives would be saved from the condemnation that our sins deserve. He works all things to save us from hell itself.

“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son.” (verse 29) Picture this. Before you were ever conceived, before you were ever thought of by your parents, before your parents were married, before your parents were born, God planned and made a choice to save you. This is what we mean by predestination, that God decided ahead of time that you would be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he would make you perfect because of his Jesus.

This decision then prompted him to call you to faith in him and his promises. For some of us, that call came when we were infants and had our sins washed clean and were made pure by the waters of baptism. For others of us, we were called later on in life through the message given to us of Jesus’ payment for our sins.

Whenever it was that we were called to faith, we were conformed to the perfection of Jesus Christ. This is what it means that God justified us. When the Holy Spirit worked that faith, which trusts that Jesus Christ did everything for my salvation and because of his merits and his works I will go to heaven, that’s when you were justified – when you were declared not guilty by God the Father of all of your sins.

The only part of God’s plan of salvation yet to take place is for him to glorify us, to bring us to live with him in heaven, to live in perfection for all eternity. Paul says God “glorified us” using the past tense because with how God works and with his promises, this is as good as done. He is now working all things in your life to draw you to this glorification, this wonderful heavenly home that he has prepared for you.

This is what God does. “In all things [he] works for the good of those who love him.” (verse 28) God gives us glimpses of that truth by the amazing examples he gives us in Scripture. Take Paul himself. You look at his situation, that in his former life he had inflicted great persecution on the Christian Church. Yet he was changed. He was called by God. And went on to be one of the greatest advocates and proclaimers of God’s message this world has ever seen. Even the persecution that he helped wreak was worked to good as it caused the young, tiny Christian Church to spread out and reach more and more people with that saving message of Jesus Christ.

Paul himself experienced physical suffering in his life, something he called a thorn in his flesh. He pleaded with God three times to take it away. God’s answer to him was, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:9) Paul learned personally that even with bad things, God would use them for his ultimate good. As he had this thorn in the flesh, he had to trust and rely on God’s undeserved love for him rather than his own talents as an apostle. He had to trust God more than he trusted in himself. So this bad thing God worked to be a good thing for Paul, something that served to strengthen his trust in God for his salvation and deliverance.

I’m sure the promise of Romans 8:28 has you thinking about so many situations in your life or in the lives of people you know and care about. You’re asking, “How will God work this for their good?” I don’t know. You don’t know. We can only go on the promise of God, the Word of God, and treat it as truth, that no matter what happens to a believer, God is going to use it as an opportunity to strengthen our faith in him, to bring us closer to the time when we will be glorified, because God has justified us, because he has called us to faith in him, because he has predestined us – chosen us to belong to him even before we came into existence – because he knew advance that he would choose us.

This chapter of Romans 8 is all about giving us long-term hope. By his own Word, God says that he takes all things and works them for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. While we endure the not good things on this earth, we cling to this promise, and pray that God stay true to his Word. God will use everything that comes into our lives to bring us closer to him and to our heavenly dwelling place. Amen.