When Life Is Tough - Part 5

Looking For The Good When Things Go Bad
Romans 8:28-30

Well this week was our first ever big time women’s conference, the Trust Conference we called it. How was that? Well I assume if you’re not clapping or clapping hard it wasn’t because you were here and didn’t like it, it was because you weren’t here. But it was a good conference and a lot of good things happening. One thing that was good and bad was that my wife was fully participating and she was preaching there and I didn’t see much of her this weekend. So it was Daddy Weekend. Yeah, I know that’s good and bad, right? But you know what Daddy Weekend means, right? Skip baths, eat out, stay up late, double desserts and an extra hour of America’s Funniest Home Videos. That’s kind of how we do Daddy Night and we were doing that on Friday night because Carlynn was here and we were there with our stinky bodies strewn about the family room, bulging bellies. This bit came on AFV that got us all laughing really hard. I mean you know you laugh so hard you just start tearing up. It was so hilarious and we were laughing and laughing and laughing and I started to feel bad that I was laughing so hard because it really was a cruel thing that was happening on the screen.

This guy had gone out and bought this novelty fake lottery ticket. Have you seen this one? And you know she scratches off all of the numbers which apparently have to match, I wouldn’t know I don’t play, and have I said that in the past? Just want to make sure you don’t e-mail me, for that at least. And they all match and it says that she’s won like $20,000 or $10,000 whatever and she’s hopping about the room and of course he’s there. What did it say? Did you win? And he’s taping her and she’s flying off and she’s got half of it spent in her mind. She’s so excited and then you just watch it turn as she starts to read the fine print. Because in the fine print of course they word it all humorously but it’s like, hey loser you didn’t win anything. This is a big joke. And you watch her go from total excitement, lottery winner, to this feeling of despair and loss, to seething anger toward her husband. The ticket says you earned nothing or whatever. And I’m thinking this guy has earned a night on the couch. I mean this is not a good joke. We’re laughing we’re crying it’s so funny just the way she’s just… And I thought that’s cruel. We shouldn’t be laughing although it’s very funny.

And I started to reflect on that. And I thought how terrible it is though to think that you have won something so great only to discover you really haven’t. I mean how bad is it really to think that you have something valuable and precious and expensive and then all of a sudden you recognize I never really had it at all. I celebrated like I had it but I didn’t have it.

We’ve been studying of course through the book of Romans, week 54, in our study of the book of Romans. And we’ve gotten to Romans chapter 8 verses 28, 29 and 30. And if you’re a Sunday School graduate immediately you say that’s familiar. That’s like one of the most familiar verses in all of the book of Romans if not all the New Testament. This is a verse we learned as kids. It is a verse that is not just read and memorized, it is celebrated and claimed. And people dance about their spiritual lives excited about the truth in this passage. And I studied it this week I read and I diagramed it out and I read all the commentaries and I pondered it and I prayed about it. And I worked on it so that I could speak to you this week about it, I couldn’t get past the first line. I kept struggling with this. Because in my heart, you can ask anybody who knows my prayer life, this is something that keeps reoccurring and really breaks my heart and that is my fear is the most absolutely horrific verse in all of the bible.

My fear is that it will be true for a portion of our church. There in Matthew 7, where all these folks are ready to high five Christ and here we are entering into the kingdom. They’re there and they got their church resume out and Jesus says, “Depart from me I never knew you.” Can you imaging going through your life thinking you and God have it done? You’ve got the inheritance it’s
booked for you in heaven, you’re on your way and then you die and you’re there and he says, “Sorry”. I mean that’s horrible. If you’ve heard me preach for any amount of time at all you know that is for me the most frightening verse in all of the bible. And part of my prayer is continually and people who pray with me know I want that portion of our church to shrink down as low as is possible. I just don’t want to stand there and have you or me or any of us hear those words because if it doesn’t apply to groups like ours who in the world does it apply to? Where they’re there going I’m in and he goes, no you’re really not. And he doesn’t say I used to know you, I make it clear every time I read it. I never knew you. You never had a relationship with me.

Let’s read these very familiar words in Romans chapter 8 and see if you in one of the most encouraging verses in all of the New Testament don’t stumble like I did this week over that first line. The very first part of Romans chapter 8 verse 28 he says, “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good.” We know that for those who love God, all things work together for good. And as if we didn’t get the clarification, the qualification, the line there that is suppose to weed out people that aren’t suppose to claim this he says is again at the bottom of verse 28 in a whole different way, but it’s the same concept. For those who are called according to his purpose. And if there’s one thing that I get when I read this, clearly all things don’t work together for good, if you don’t love God and if you’re not called according to His purpose. And that just sent chills down my spine and I couldn’t get over it. I thought to myself, my fear is that I’ll get up here and preach as I would had I rushed into this sermon. If you asked me on the dime, “Hey you have two hours, prepare it.” I don’t know what kind of sermon that would look like but I certainly wouldn’t sit here and spend time focusing on those lines. I’d want to rush right to the meat of the verse. All things work together for good. I mean that’s the good news. I’d want to dance around with that spiritual lottery ticket and go look what we’ve got? Isn’t it great? And then of course my prayer life brings me to a place of thinking how many of us will go through this life thinking this was true about us and in reality it never was.

He talks about the purpose of God in verses 29 and 30 which is all we’ll have time to cover. Which is probably more than what we have time to cover, but we’ll try. I mean there’s a lot in this sermon. Are you sure you want to do this? There’s a lot here. I mean I only have 3 hours allotted for this sermon so I don’t know if we can get it all in but I’ll try. Verse 29, for those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he, that is Christ, might be the prototokos, the prototype, we translate it firstborn. Obviously Christ wasn’t born in the sense of coming into existence but as the prototype among many brothers. The captain of the team. The quarterback of the whole squad. He’s going to be that firstborn among many brothers. Because those he predestined he has already said in the top of verse 29 if he foreknew you he predestined you. Now he says if he has predestined you he has also called you. If he has called you he has also justified you and those whom he has justified he has also glorified. So that chain of events foreknew, predestined, predestined, called, called, justified, glorified. I mean that is some kind of anchor that is supposed to get me thinking, “Okay, I get it, all things do work together for good, whatever that means.” We’ll look at that, but I can’t even spend time looking at that until I ask a question of you as your pastor I would be remiss if I didn’t. Are you sure that you love God? And are you sure that you’re called according to His purpose? Number one on your outline, you need to be sure. Be sure you love God.

1. Be Sure You Love God

Be sure you love God. Because I don’t want you to go away from this sermon thinking that you have all things working together for your good if in reality you don’t love God. It should be clear with a parallel line in the bottom of verse 28. For those called according to His purpose. There is only two categories there. You’re either called according to His purpose or you’re not. Same thing is and should be true in our minds when we read the first line. Either you love God or you don’t. This is not a verse trying to get us to think that this is some kind of spectrum or sliding scale and you know the more you love God the more things work together for good. And if you really like Him a lot, you really love him a lot well then a lot of things work together for good. That’s not it. This is another way to say, Christians, Okay? That’s our nomenclature our
terminology. Hey if you’re a Christian all things work together for good, if you’re a Christian. That’s what we’re saying there. So this is not some kind of sliding scale, how much do you love God well that’s how much things work out for good, that’s not it. Or I should really love Him more because then I’ll qualify to get this verse. That’s not it. This is describing Christianity because that’s how the bible likes to describe Christians, they love God. I mean that’s the characteristics of Christians, they love God. And you either love Him or you don’t.

Now that’s the first thing I want to clarify, the second thing I want to clarify which I think to me is the biggest challenge of being a pastor in the 21st century in any western culture, America perhaps the worst. I can say that to you be sure you love God, I can ask the question, “Do you love God?” And most of you in that sense go to evaluate the word love. And you start asking, “Well, I don’t know, do I? Let me think about it. Oh, yeah I do. I do. I love God.” I really don’t want to talk about love quite yet. I’d like us to ponder our love for God by first examining the direct object of that sentence. Do you love God? And by that I mean the real God. Not the small g, god of your imagination, because in 21st century western Christianity here’s the problem. We all go around in our culture generally as people that unfortunately avoid this book, I don’t want to be so down on our culture but we’re really not people of the book the way we use to be as quote unquote professing Christians. My problem is if I don’t love the God of this book then I love the god of my imagination and the god of my imagination is not the real God.

Let me give you a verse for that and we won’t have time to get through everything in this sermon if we look them all up so at least write it down, Psalm 50 verse 21, let’s just jot that down and some of you have heard me preach for years and I bring this one up at least once a year because it’s so important for us to see God’s logic here and it’s so good and here’s what He says. Let me just quote it for you. He says after listing sins that the people are committing, He says, “I kept silent and you thought I was one like you.” Follow the logic here. You did wrong, you though wrong, you believed the wrong things and I didn’t respond. I didn’t send the lighting bolt out of the sky, I didn’t zap you with the divine bug zapper. I sat by and didn’t do anything about it. There was not immediate judgment and therefore you carried that belief about me you did that thing and thought it was cool with me, you continued with that line of living and you thought I was alright with it because I didn’t judge you on the spot. You started to think that I, the God of the universe, the holy one, was like you. And I was simply a projection of your values and your ideas and your imaginations and your preferences and your wants about what you hope God would be. The reason I say for western 21st century Christianity this is the hardest is because I constantly have people talk to me about God and I, you know this is my problem, start quoting Bible verses, or we start opening our Bibles and looking at what the Bible says and I don’t mean to be pejorative or argumentative but I start saying, “Well, I don’t really know if that really is what is says here about God and this is what God…” And they start feeling offended because now I’m questioning their view of God and they hate the fact that I’m quoting Bible verses and could you stop with all that. And I am constantly if not regularly at least accused of being too into the Bible. I mean, I get that all the time. I had it this week, someone called me this week, I love it, a Bible idolater. That’s what I was called this week. Not the first time but I love it when they use those Bible words about me. I’m a Bible idolater they called me. I thought to myself when it comes to us discussing who God really is and you don’t like the fact that I’m going back to the Bible to define who God is and maybe calling into question your view of God which I may not think really takes into consideration this passage or this verse or these concepts and so we should really look here and they say, “hmm…you’re a Bible idolater”, Bible thumper, Bible whatever and you’re just too into that. Which means, translation, I love the god that I am kind of feeling my way to, I’m kind of imagining and thinking. And they’ll even say it in my discussions, “Well, that’s not how I feel God is.” “Oh, okay” or “That’s not, you know, how I would do it. I see that but.” Okay. “Oh, if you were God you wouldn’t do that. And if you weren’t God you wouldn’t be that. And if you did this whole thing it wouldn’t be…” But I’m just saying I’m stuck here because I don’t have time even in this sermon obviously but we’ve preached for hours on this. We believe that this book is the only propositional objective unalterable source of revelation from God to men. That’s what we believe about this book, the imprimatur of God’s predictive prophecy, the messiah predictions alone. This book is not like the Koran, it’s not like any other religious book, it has the fingerprint and signature
of God and therefore we believe it's the only reliable source and unchanging source of revelation of God to man therefore if you and I want to love God we better be loving the God of the Bible. And the only way we're going to define that is to go to the Bible, see, so in my mind if I'm asking the question, do I love God, I have to really say, “Hrm, Do I love the God of the Bible?” Because that God doesn't always do things the way I would do it. Thank God for that. He's not always acting in the ways that I would act. That whole conquest thing and Canaan, I don't know, I wouldn't have done that. Those rules about what to do there and I don't know about that. And only guys can be pastors I don't like that. I mean, I can go on and on and on. This isn't the book that I would write. These aren't the rules I would have. But I'm stuck. I had a gal tell me after church not long ago, you know what we were talking about God; we were talking about some aspects of God. She said if that's really what God is like I don't even like your God. I said, “Oh, okay.” Well, not the God that I created I'm just looking at what God has revealed Himself to be and here's the problem with that statement. I think it's the only God there is. Oh, I know there's another god in your mind but it's a god that you imagined to be not the God who's revealed Himself to be so I'm stuck. And you know what? I want to love the God of the Bible. Let me just move this through in this logic. If I love God, I'm going to love the window into the character of God or let's just make it sentimental, the letter from God about himself I'm going to love that and if I don't love that how can I really say I love God?

We could look at a lot of things about whether or not you love God or not but let me just put it this way you don't love God if you don't love this book. You just don't. You're kidding yourself because this book is how we know who God is. It's the way we know him. Therefore if this book is something you carry to church because, I don't know, they expect you to, and then it goes on the shelf and you don't touch and it's not something you, here's how Peter put it (1 Peter 2:2) crave, then I'm thinking there's a real problem here, because you and I should love the revealed document of his character, who he is, because I can't love God if I don't love his revelation. One example, let's turn to Psalm 119 and read the whole thing. (laughter) You could, you really could, I don't know if you noticed this or not but the whole thing is about this guy's love for the word of God. Have you noticed that? It's an acrostic poem. Do you know what an acrostic poem is? Just to review here, for those that missed Sunday School, an acrostic poem is a poem that every line starts with the letter and then sequentially goes through all the alphabet. Psalm 119 because it's going to be the biggest chapter in all the Bible does it eight times per letter. So we have all the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, Aleph, Beth, Gimel, Daleth, He, Vav, all the way down to Taw, and you have eight verses starting with all those letters. Eight verses for Aleph, eight verses for Beth, Gimel, Daleth all the way through. Drop down to how the ESV puts it down, Waw, which we usually pronounce Vaw, is a better maybe more accurate way to pass your seminary exams. Fourty one, they have labels there. Waw, you're thinking waw, what's that? It's a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. And here they come this is verse 41. We're going to read the eight verses here, 41 through 48.

You love God you'll love his communiqué to us. Let your steadfast love come to me. Here's a guy seeking God, he wants God. O Yahweh, your salvation according to your promise; then I will have an answer for him who taunts me, for I trust in your word. And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, I want to speak it, for my hope is in your rules. Legalist. I will keep your law continually, forever and ever. Zealot. I shall walk in a wide place, I've sought your precepts. I will speak of your testimonies before kings and I shall not be put to shame, for I find delight in your commandments, which I, dare I say, love. You Bible idolater. I will lift up my hands toward your commandments. Wow, this guys certainly an idolater. Which I love and I will meditate on your statutes. My mind is going to rest on it, I'm going to praise with my hands toward the word. I mean think about that. Here's a guy who loves the word of God because he loves the God of the Bible. Don't tell me you love God if you don't love his word. Just don't tell me that because it is illogical and impossible. It is logically impossible for you to say love God without loving the book.

So you say, “Great, I got to get on that write that down. Love God and love his word more.” It's not going to be a “to do” item. You just can't do it by writing it down and saying to do it. The love of God and the love of his word is a divine gift. Some of you with a testimony we could open up
the mike you could come up here and you could talk about that. There was a time when you did not love the word of God; as a matter of fact it irritated you especially when that guy preached it with an unvarnished forthright way. You hated it and you hated him. But then God did something in your life and it changed everything about your disposition toward the Bible. Did that happen to you? You know what that's like? And then like babies, 1 Peter 2:2, you craved it, you wanted it. You carried one around to work even. Zealot. Because you started getting into it, you wanted to quote it, you wanted to memorize it because the word of God now was part of your love for God because you knew that God revealed himself in the pages of this book and it is something that comes from God.

One verse on this and that’s all we’ll have time for. Ephesians 6. I know I just gave you 8 but let’s go to Ephesians 6 the very last paragraph of the book. Go to the very end of the book of Ephesians. I just want to let you know and saying all that, that love for God and his word, if that’s the qualification for getting the great spiritual lottery ticket of Romans 8:28 then here’s the deal, you need to know it’s something God gives. And if you want it, you got to ask for it, you can’t just work on it and get it. You can’t work up this love for God, it has to be granted to you because it’s a kind of love that if it is self manufactured I guarantee you it will go away. If it’s given to you by God it will never go away. By the way the parable of the soils, remember the four soils? First one has no interest in the word at all and the last one is the only one that bears fruit. Well all in different varieties 30, 60, 100 fold. There are two soils in between, do you remember those? Those all, here’s how Jesus interprets the parables; they embrace the word with excitement or enthusiasm. They like it, give me some more of that and then they, not interested. I don’t know how long it takes, but it says in time and it gives all the reasons because of their desire for riches, because of persecution, because of the word that arises all these worries of this life, there’s a lot of reasons that all of a sudden their love for the word of God and the God behind the word of God, it wanes and goes away. So if it’s self manufactured it’s not going to stick around, if though it’s from God you will have that love and it will never go away. It won’t be perfectly expressed in every day of your life but it’s not going to wane. That’s why these flash in the pan Christians that come along it could be one month, two months, two years, I don’t know and then they go away, John was very clear about that. They went out from us because they were not really of us. If they would have been of us they would have remained with us. That sounds like a tongue twister but that’s a good truth to remember why. Look at this, end of the book of Ephesians. Ephesians chapter 6 look at verse 23 and 24. Peace be to the brothers. He’s ending the book here. And love with faith, where does that come from? From God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Love with faith it comes from God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ. Love with faith it comes from God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ. Now he says, Grace be with, now he called them brothers in verse 23 now he’s going to say, all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love that can’t go away. It doesn’t diminish, it doesn’t fade away. It’s love, great word, incorruptible.

Question, do you love Christ with a love incorruptible? You don’t get it by trying you get it by asking. It comes as a part and parcel facet of the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life. Talked a lot about that in this series and the last series but does God’s Spirit live in you? Sometimes I can’t even figure out what he wants me to pray for, that was last week. But I do know this, he grants me a love for God and his word that never goes away. And that means if you really have God in your life it’s a love incorruptible and that love you have for God will be here, if you live 10 more years it’ll be here 10 years from now. If you live 20 more years, 30 more years, you young whipper snappers, if you’re here 50 years from now you’ll be loving God and his word because it’s love incorruptible.

If you’re sitting here, you’re thinking, well I’ve been on this thing for awhile and I had a few goose bumps at the beginning and it was really cool to go to the Fall Fest and my kids were in the camps but I don’t know I’m kind of getting bored all this Bible thumping and I don’t know this could be our last season at this church. Maybe we’ll try another one, I don’t know. If that’s you, and I’m not saying we’re a perfect expression of God and his word but I mean it’s not a love incorruptible. See what I’m saying? This whole kind of attaching ourselves to churches and ehh forget about it. I ran into somebody, I don’t even want to share these stories, and I think to myself,
I say to them when they say oh I don’t go to church anymore. I’m like, what? And you know what I could have asked them long before they stopped going to church. Are you in the word? And you know what they’re going to say? Ehhh, I don’t know, kind of busy, don’t know. They can tell me everything that happen on ESPN for the last week. They know everything about whatever, ladies know everything about every Hollywood starlet, but you didn’t crack the book this week. That’s why I’m not telling you to put on your To Do list, read Bible more, love Bible more, love God more. I’m just asking this question, if all this work together for good for you, you got to know you got to be someone who loves God and is called according to his purpose and that happens when God plants this love incorruptible in your heart for him and his truth.

Because I’m your pastor and if indeed I am and because I love you and I don’t want you to hear “depart from me I never knew you” I got to spend whatever time I just spent asking you again to test yourself to see if you’re of the faith. Make sure you love God with a love incorruptible. I’ve often taken you to 1 John or we could do all that or you’re seeing a change in your behavior you’re not sinless but you’re sinning less, sanctification, do you keep his rules, if you love me you’ll keep my commandments, we could go there we’ve done all that a hundred times. This week I just wanted to say one expression of it is a love for his word and a love that does not wane. I know we’re imperfect and there’s a battle going on our life but please let’s not meet up at the bema seat of Christ and have him say depart from me. I mean, I want to be there, I want you to be there. And it would be good for us to go through the discomfort of sitting through a service and saying I don’t know what am I in it for? Do I really love God? And if you do, well if you’re asking for him to give you that capacity right now, then we can move on to the spiritual lottery ticket and it is for you and it is really one of the best promises in all the Bible.

Here it is, verse 28. Romans 8:28. Six words in English, three words in Greek, very powerful concept, huge all encompassing superlative language here it comes. And we know that for those who love God, those called according to his purpose, all things, how many things? All things work together for good. All things work together for good. All things work together for good if you love God and are called according to his purpose. Notice that it doesn’t say all things are good. Are all things good? Context, I mean look at the context, look back at verse 17, provided that we suffer with him. Verse 18, the sufferings of the present time, verse 20, groaning, the creation is groaning, we’re groaning. Just glance through the context of course all things are not good, as a matter of fact that’s the problem with the passage. I’m a Christian and bad things are happening. It’s going to end with a long laundry list here verses 31 to the end of the chapter about all the terrible things that happen to us as Christians. All things are not good but all things work together for good. With an implied subject here, God is obviously doing this because God is the one who even in my salvation starts with foreknowledge predestination, predestination calling, calling justification, justification glorification.

Can we just circle the word good though for a second in verse number 28 and go to verse 29 to try and define what the good is? Because here is often how the verse is quoted, by the way you can jot that down on number 2 on your outline. We need to understand, make sure you put the good in quotes, understand the “good” that God is working toward.

2. Understand The “Good” God Is Working Toward

That’s what I need to know because I’m going to expect the wrong thing if I don’t know how good is defined. Understand the good that God is working toward. But what is the good he’s working toward? Because here’s the misunderstanding of Romans chapter 8 verse 28 that we need to completely avoid and wipe completely out of our minds and here’s how it goes in youth group. Let’s start there. Girl gets dumped by her boyfriend. All her little Christian friends go up to her. It’s okay, Romans 8:28, Romans 8:28, Romans 8:28. What does that mean? Well that means that guy dumped you but here’s the thing, God’s got a hunkier guy for you if that guy dumped you because all things work together for good. And then you laugh but it happens out here by the coffee pot when you get laid off from your job and some old sage goes Romans 8:28, Romans 8:28, Romans 8:28, Romans 8:28. What does that mean? Well that means you got fired from that job, here’s the
thing, God’s closing doors and opening window and here’s the deal you’re going to get a better job, it’s going to pay better, better benefits it’ll be great for you because all things work together for good. I mean I’ve heard this logic my entire life in the church. Something bad happens to you, it’s okay all that means is it’s going to be better. Oh your house got foreclosed on, don’t worry, your house will be so much bigger the next one you get, it’s going to be great because all things work together for good. You thought that house was nice, forget about it, let’s just trust and claim Romans 8:28. All things work together for good.

Ahh, that’s not what good means in this context. Good in verse 28 is defined by the purpose of God in verse 29. Please put a circle around good and draw a line and an arrow to this phrase, ready? For those he foreknew, more on that in a minute, he also predestined, more on that in a minute, to be conformed to the image of his son. In order that he that is Christ might be the firstborn, the prototokos, the prototype among many brothers, the captain, the great leader of this band of people that are just like him. So he predestined, he has this plan ahead of time that we would be conformed to the image of his son so it does not mean that if you encounter some pain it’s okay because that pain is only going to open up for you more pleasure or more peace or more prosperity. It does not mean that. Example we don’t need to turn there, we were there last week, 2 Corinthians 12. Paul prays for the thorn in the flesh to go away. He’s got a physical problem and God says absolutely. Is that what God says? No, God says No because my power is perfected in weakness. And you got a problem here because you’re so privileged in this new movement of Christ that you need to be governed in your attitude so this is going to stay there so you don’t inflate yourself and become a prideful person. Question, did it get better for Paul with this chronic illness? No, the pain stayed but in light of our passage did he become more like Christ when the pain stayed? Yes. See, when you have your house foreclosed on and you stay in an apartment for the rest of your life the question isn’t are you going to have more good in terms of square footage, the question is, is there more good in terms of Christ-likeness in your life. I find that a lot of people are more Christ-like in an apartment than a house just like God found that Paul would be more Christ-like with a chronic illness then without it. And some people do better in terms of Christ-likeness with a job that’s not as prestigious or doesn’t pay as much. Some people become much more Godly when they’re unemployed, do you see what I’m saying? And can’t find a job for six months. My point is this, the good that God is working out is found clearly spelled out for us in verse 29 and it is to be conformed to the image of his son.

Now you real purists and exegete are going to say, “Whoa wait a minute, this is really going to end in verse 30 with glorified” Good observation, thanks for pointing that out. Earlier it talks about the whole point of our groaning is to be adopted as sons the redemption of the body isn’t conformity to Christ the ultimate glorification of you and I and the answer is yes. You’re absolutely right. In the big scheme of things the good and the bad and the indifferent that comes into our lives is all going to work towards that in the very end when I stand in the presence of Christ is going to work for good in an eschatological sense, at the end of all things. And it will be good even if it never improves in this life but also I find that throughout the scripture we become increasingly conformed to the image of God through the good and bad in our lives. As a matter of fact you look at a lot of the pain God brings into our life to mature us. We talked about the pruning; we talked about the maturation of Romans 5 the suffering produces endurance and endurance character, character hope. The bad stays so that I can become more Christ-like now, the pain of correction, Hebrews 12 makes me more Godly. I yield the peaceful fruit of righteousness because of that pain. Or assurance of my faith, 1 Peter 1 the pain comes so that I can know for sure that I have faith that’s real and genuine or the protection of 2 Corinthians 12 that we just quoted. I’m not going to fall into that sin if God keeps this pain in my life here. You got to understand the good God is working toward is Christ-likeness both in this life and the next. And what will he use, what does it say? All things. It can’t mean all things, it means all things. All things work together for that good.

All things? All things. All things when people do evil to us, and I couldn’t be have pastor card in my wallet if I didn’t quote Genesis 50 verse 20. You should at least jot that down you don’t need to turn there. But if you want to modernize this, let’s use these words. This guy named Joe,
there’s an attempted murder on his life and then he gets involved in human trafficking. How’s that? Does that sound relevant, modern? Very 21st century and both of those are bad. If I go to Somalia and all of a sudden there’s an attempted murder of my life, an attempted assassination of Pastor Mike, I’m over there doing ministry and you get the word back on the blog. I’m on the blog, oh they just tried to kill me. And the next day you find out I’ve been sold in to the human trafficking trade of Somalia. Now I’m a slave I don’t know what I’d do over there but let’s just say I’m a slave. You’d tell your friend pray for our pastor I hope you’d say, “Pray for our pastor this is really bad.” This is bad, and it is bad it’s evil and it’s sinful you shouldn’t sell other people in Somalia in human trafficking and you shouldn’t try to kill people that’s wrong certainly because of jealousy and envy and strife which the brothers tried to do. But Genesis 50:20 we learned it as kids you know it now, he said, now he’s looking at his brothers in the eye after all the ordeal, though you meant it for evil, do you remember the verse? God meant it, as if he were doing it now that’s weird I thought the brothers did it, this is the mystery of it all, while the brothers meant it for evil here’s God somehow mysteriously intertwined in the same events working this whole thing and meaning it, God meant it for good. Have you been sinned against in this life? This morning, on the way here, right? Absolutely. Every time evil was foisted upon you or people sinned against you even those things are working toward some good that God has planned that will ultimately lead in his glory and in your Christ-likeness. There are other things going on Genesis 50 as well clearly the saving of the nation of Israel this very fragile nation from Abraham descendents and Christ was going to come from that and we saved them through this terrible famine.

How about the things that God does to us that seem so evil? He sentenced us to death after all, right? I suppose again if you heard today I’m driving to Taco Bell on the way home and guys jump out from a bush and they shoot me in the head and they cut my body up dismember me and send me all over California, you’d say, “Wow something really bad happened to my pastor today.” You’d say that I hope, right? Would that be bad? That would be bad. How could that be meant for good? Here’s how it’s meant for good, I mean that is really the ultimate bad that could happen and it was a sentence from God and God has sentenced me to death. He said we’ll return to the dust, he has sentenced Mike Fabarez to death and one day I will die and when you hear that I’ve died that’s a bad thing especially if you get cut up and parts of my body end up in the mail. That’s bad. But that’s good. It’s bad but it’s good. Why is it good? Because in God’s plan of conforming me to the image of Christ it’s never going to happen in this body. I’ve got to somehow get this body through the portal of death so that I can get a new body, the redemption of the body, and stand in the presence of God without a body that has a proclivity to sin and doesn’t fight me. And we can chain up Satan in this deal and my body cooperates and my spirit loves God then you know what? I can live a godly life like Christ. Our captain, our prototokus. I can do that so it’ll be good if I died. Paul said for me to live is Christ but to die is gain. Even death and I know we pray constantly for people, “Oh they’re in the hospital pray they don’t die.” I’m all about that because I want what’s good, not what’s bad but if the bad happens I know God working that bad for good if you love and are called according to his purpose. Death is really bad if you don’t love God and are not call according to his purpose. When people sin against me, when God sentences me to terrible things in life whether it’s suffering or ultimate death but what about when I sin, isn’t that the real question here for a lot of us? Most you know maturations and concepts about this people sitting around and pondering this that’s the question we always get there. What about my sin. That would never be good.

This will blow your mind. Go to Ephesians chapter 1. Always a good way to set up a cross reference, this will blow your mind. Again in a very mysterious way and I got to say that because before we’re done we’re going to get into more mystery. Even when I sin it falls under the umbrella of all things. When people sin against me, when God sentences me to bad and painful things and even when I stumble and fail, God if I love him and am called according to his purpose is going to even work those shameful episodes of my life for his glory and my ultimate good. How does that work? Ephesians 1:3, let’s just read this paragraph, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. It’s all judicially done. Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. Well see there that’s what he wants me to be, I
understand that but you’re never going to be holy and blameless before God unless he makes you so. First of all by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, he has to present you before him holy and blameless because of the imputed righteousness of Christ. Now he wants you to live holy, I get that. But in love, bottom of verse 4 beginning of verse 5, he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the fact that we would do more good then bad and we are kind of cute after all and he wants to pinch our little chubby cheeks, because he thinks we make pretty good Christians. Underline all that. Is that there? No, it’s not there. Well then I must be missing it. In love, he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, what’s that? Not because I’m good, not because I was a great Christian, to the praise of his glorious grace, whose glorious anything? God’s His. Salvation and adoption and the consummation of my adoption, follow this now, is all ultimately to the praise of his glorious grace.

Would it be good to praise his glorious grace? That sounds good, I don’t know what it all means but I would want to be, yes, I’ll say yes. Let’s praise his glorious grace. Are adoption is to the praise of his glorious grace, what is grace? You don’t deserve it, you don’t live up to it, you don’t earn it, you can’t be good enough for it and when you sit on the mantle of God in heaven as a trophy of his grace and you bring glory to God, the glory you bring to God in part is the glory you bring to his grace and the grace is put on display because you are a sinner and because you’ve sinned. I know that’s mind blowing but the point is this, keep reading, drop down to verse 11, in him we have obtained an inheritance, not because we’ve earned it, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, which even includes my failures, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. God is going to look good because he saved a bunch of sinners. Matter of fact here’s how Paul put it when he wrote Timothy in 1 Timothy 1, he said, “God saved me the worst of all sinners.” He gets down to this explanation, in order that he might demonstrate his perfect patience as an example to those who would believe. Why didn’t he pick a better guy than Paul? Because Paul’s sin was going to be to the praise of his glorious grace including his patience. Do you see the point here? So let’s all go out and sin big this week. No, why because sin is bad just like kidnapping is bad, attempted murder is bad, slavery and all that, bad. So let’s do good this week, but when you do bad this week and you stumble and fall this week, repent, cling to the cross, and recognize that even in your failure God will be glorified on that day as an amazingly gracious person to save and adopt someone like you and it’ll be to the praise of his glorious grace. That’s a mind blowing concept but even my sin will work for good because I’m called according to his purpose and part of my purpose is to bring praise to his glorious grace.

I don’t know how you live but I think most Christians live with this very uneasy anxiety in their hearts that I wish I could change everything and it’s just not quite right and what have I missed and the opportunity, I don’t know. And all I’m telling you is if you start to understand the sovereignty of God you will begin to, number 3, jot this one down, rest in God’s management of all things.

3. Trust In God’s Management Of All Things

Good, bad and indifferent. Righteous, evil and in between, God is managing everything. And I need to recognize that though it’s amazingly mysterious that I can be a culpable responsible agent and make decisions and God is somehow working everything after the council of his will, it’s all going to work out for my good and his glory. I need to recognize that there’s something in my heart that ought to go, “Ahh, oh wow, I’m sure glad.” Isn’t that where we started at the last verse of last week? Even when you’re praying the wrong things the Spirit is praying the right things in accordance with the perfect will of God and now he says everything in your life, everything has been worked together by God’s oversight for good. I know we don’t have time for this and if you got to go, go. But can you look at this chain here of words? Those he foreknew he predestined, those he predestined he called, those he called he justified, those he justified he glorified. You see all that? The end game is glorification and then I’ll be perfectly conformed to the
image of his son but what should give me confidence that everything is going to work out according to God’s perfect plan is the mystery of my salvation. Just like I’m saying there’s a mystery in my failure and God’s glory and my good, there’s a mystery in the fact that someone preached the gospel to me at one point and I made a decision to follow Christ but I read a passage like this and I recognize that all of that was really God working out a plan that he did before I ever had a brain cell to think a thought. He did it. These five things, foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, glorification are all put in this passage to prove to me that God is at work even in something that looks like I was doing it. I was doing it. Yeah, but you really weren’t. You were but God was working in all of that and that’s what this is all about.

Let’s start with the second word in the chain, predestination, I’ll do this quick. Predestination, simple word, it simply means, pre, ahead of time, destiny, something decided. Prearranged, predecided, prechoice. It was God making a decision ahead of time. I have people come up to me at the door, they’re new to the church, “Hey, you believe in predestination?” And I’m thinking what a dumb question. You know of course I believe in predestination. That’s like saying, do you believe in God. It’s all over the Bible. We all believe in it and I know what they mean by that and I don’t say it’s a dumb question because I know what you really mean by that and what you’re really asking me is how do you understand predestination. I’m going to start with the second word because most people would believe that God did something in eternity past that relates to my salvation that ends in my glorification. Most people are going to go, check, I’m into that one. But the real question is, what came before that? And in our chain what comes before that? The word foreknowledge, right? Who he foreknow, and that’s really where the debate is. What does that mean? Here’s what most modern 21st century, what I like to say people that just don’t want to be bothered by any conundrums. Do you know what a conundrum is? Two concepts that are in conflict, I can’t quite figure out. And to me by the way if I want to avoid conundrums you might as well give up on God all together. I mean seriously, let’s go believe in a tree or something because God is complicated, isn’t he? And I don’t know why people are always stumbling over foreknowledge which is something that I’m going to explain to you that doesn’t fit the modern evangelical view of it all. I don’t know why they stumble over this that all of these are God’s doing none of these are my doing. I don’t know why we stumble over that when we don’t stumble over other things about God’s character like the fact as Paul put it in 1 Timothy 6 he alone posses immortality. Think about that. We talk about immortal, put on immortality, we talk about everlasting life, eternal life but you understand we may start and then live forever but only one didn’t start and is living forever. That’s ultimate immortality.

I once led a mathematician to Christ by God’s grace, and I was the tool as Paul liked to say in that process and it took us like 6 weeks at Coco’s and I didn’t do well in math so this is was a hard evangelistic breakfast weekly discussion. But the guy had all, you get to a certain place in math and it’s not even math anymore, right? It becomes philosophy, quantum mechanics, it’s bizarre. So we debated all these things about God and every week we come back, we take our questions and we discuss it and dialog about it all and in that discussion it was so good to see this guy who was such a logical thinker, recognize that the problem with all things is time and eternity. I don’t care if you’re Dawkins or Kitchen or who you are, you could be the most rank atheist you still got a problem with the concept of how we got here in time. And they use to pause it is simply on college campus, either you believe in an eternal God or you believe in eternal matter. You believe in eternal something because somehow we got here, because if it never had a beginning how we get here? An analogy we discussed over and over again how long does it take to crawl out of a bottomless pit, how long does that take? Well, I don’t know? You never get out of a bottomless pit, why? Because you can never start. That’s the problem. I’m going to throw you into a bottomless pit, now you crawl out, how long is it going to take? It’ll take you forever, you’ll never make any progress, see we got a problem with a God who claims to be immortal. You can be Rene Descartes you can be whoever you want to be, you can be all the guys who talk about infinite regression, we can get into all of that but the concept, who created God, who’s God’s God and all that but the bottom line is you’re stuck. Either we have something eternal called God, who supersedes the bounds of time or heads will pop off our shoulders because it doesn’t make any sense. So we have a God that’s immortal but that doesn’t keep you up a night
did it? Somehow you just slept like a baby last night and God is eternal, I don’t know how it works but he’s eternal. But you stay up late frustrated with predestination and foreknowledge, why?
Don’t start me on the Trinity. I affirm the Trinity but I don’t understand it. And if you want to make God an understandable God, a little deity you can slip in your back pocket because you fully got him covered, I’m thinking you’re god and he’s something else because God is much more complicated then you’re little finite brain can figure out. So we’re stuck with a God that is beyond the bounds of our understanding. That’s what the Bible teaches.

And here’s one of the bizarre things about God, while he puts you on the planet with your volition to make decisions, he’s working this thing all out from the beginning starting with foreknowledge. I got to deal with this, foreknowledge. So that grumbling tummy just put it off for another second another minute or two. Here’s how in a Hebrew mindset, a Hebrew idiom takes the word, Yadaw in Hebrew, it’s the word, to know, the verb to know. And proginosko the Greek word in the New Testament often reflects that Hebrew idiom which is not information in my head, it’s something else. Matter a fact we all giggled at this in the King James Bible when we were little in Genesis chapter 4 verse 1 were it says Adam knew Eve and they conceived a child and named him Cain.
Knew, you did more than know her, right? I mean you’re having babies with her, that’s more than just, hey I know that girl Eve I’ve seen her around. No you knew her and that’s a different kind of know. See Yadaw in Hebrew often means intimacy. It means love. And in the New Testament when we see the word proginosko, ahead of time knowing, we’re not talking about God having a knowledge ahead of time, although there are some passages where that simple definition works in context but when we’re talking about God’s “foreknowledge” we’re not saying he sat in the living room of heaven watching the Tivo seeing what you would decide to do and then he rolled the tape back into eternity past and decided to save you because he knew if you got the opportunity you’d make the right choice because you’re really smart and really godly. You have a leaning toward good things and you’re going to like my Christ so I chose you. That’s how most people understand foreknowledge.

That’s not how Paul uses the word. Let me prove it you, one passage on this, that’s all we have time for, Romans chapter 11. Now I’m sorry about this because we’re going to get to the thorny theological discussion in Romans 9, we’re going to get there, Lord willing we’ll be there. Paul is not putting this list together for us so we can get stumbled over the theological questions. He’s trying to encourage us and I’m messing it all up in this sermon right now by getting you into the discussion. But I just want to prove to you before we just assume the modern evangelical understanding of this that that’s not Paul’s understanding of this word. Romans 11:1 and 2, I ask, then, has God rejected his people? I mean, here’s the question, I mean, if the Jews and Gentiles were the new thing, the church is the new deal, well then I guess Israel their done, he hates the Israelites now. By no means! For I myself, Paul says, am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew, proginosko. Hmm, he knew all about them ahead of time because he watched the Tivo. No, foreknow is contrasted with the word reject. He doesn’t reject because he from the beginning has loved them. It’s how the Jews love to talk about their covenental relationship with God. Does this not sound familiar? They would boast about it in the Pentateuch, God has set his love on us. God has chosen to love us, why? Not because we were the greatest of all the nations. No, we were the smallest but he set his love on us. The answer in the Bible as to why God loves the Israelites is because God loves the Israelites. God set his love on them. God decided to love them and because he decided to love them way beforehand before they were ever created then he chooses to save them.

Whom he foreknew he predestined and those he predestined he also then verse 30, called. And that’s not a general call. Hey anybody want to follow Christ? Well, we’ll see who comes. I don’t know let’s see what happens. This call based on foreloving and forechoosing he now brings them. Just like Jesus said no one will come to me unless the Father first, here’s the verb he uses, draw him. There’s a work of God in calling, this is what we call an effectual call, it always works. How do I know it always works? Because those he called he also justified. Not everybody who sits through a gospel sermon is justified, no, but those he called in this context, this golden chain
of salvation, he justifies. And those he justifies, hey you’re in between justification and glorification, I just want to tell you it’s a sure thing just as sure as it was between foreknowledge and predestination and calling and calling and justification. And so it is between justification and glorification. You can be sure you’re going to make it, you’ll be there. It’ll all be to the praise of God’s grace and for your good. So, it’s all going to work out.

Foreknowledge, we’re going to get into the theological discussion in Romans chapter 9. And I know I often joke about Operation Crowd Reduction but this could really be the one. Because what I’m going to do is I’m going to take you out of the center all this, move you to the side and try and put God in the center of all this and say he’s the architect of every part of our salvation and that we will struggle with, why? Because it’s a mystery. I did choose God, but I didn’t choose God, right? And he looked then said, “Oh, well then if you’re going to choose me I’ll choose you first.” No, God chose me and that is why I chose God because my decisions are predicated on his decisions. God forbid that I would think that his decisions are predicated on my decisions.

See I believe that God is the architect of this whole thing. Just like I would think you would if I said put yourself at the front entrance of Eco-wrecking, you know we don’t have that many junk yards anymore. But picture the old junk yards, there’s one down there in Oceanside. Do you ever drive by that one? There’s all the cars stacked up. There’s a lot more of that in the olden days. But there they are. And you’re going to get a new car. So you go to the junk yard and you stand there at the entrance and you say, “Alright, I’m going to put out the call here. All you cars who want to be mine you come on right now to my garage. Come on.” And wait and see what happens. What happens? Nothing. Most cars don’t have wheels, right? Cars don’t have engines, they’ve been stripped like little termites come in there and take everything apart. The cars are not going anywhere unless you spend a lot of time getting them ready and you get in them and put a key in them and drive them to your garage. That’s the only way they’re going to get there. That’s the picture of how bad sin is in the Bible. We are dead in our transgressions and sins. And it’s not as though God looked ahead in his little DVR in heaven and saw that when he came to the graveyard of the cars, the junk yard, called and he noticed hey, that one over there is coming. Hey, here he comes. Here it comes. Oh, I chose him because he’s coming. Here’s what God did according to the Bible. He made those who were dead; he made them alive in Christ. Talk to Lazarus about that one. I mean that’s an effectual call. Lazarus wasn’t sitting around, well I don’t know, pretty persuasive. He’s not sitting there debating it. He comes out in obedience from the grave. And so it was according to the Bible from this side of the tapestry that God from foreloving and foredeciding and calling and justifying and glorifying it’s all God’s doing. Now you want to flip the tapestry over and start to think about how you went through all that, fine. Somehow those all work together like the mystery of three in one or the God who never had a beginning or the invisible God who dwells in unapproachable light, we could go on and on and on. But God is at work and what should that do for us? It should allow me to rest in the fact that my life is not chaotic it’s not by chance it’s not out of control and we’re not waiting to see what God will do. And that’s moved it’s way into seminaries. Now it’s called Open Theism and we’re kind of looking at God on the sideline who’s a great odds maker and he decides things in prophecy because he’s a great guesser but he doesn’t know how things are exactly going to play out. It look it up. That’s modern theology in a lot of modern liberal seminaries today and not so liberal seminaries. It’s called Open Theism and people think, well, I don’t know. See here I’m going to hold to it at least at Compass Bible Church as long as I’m preaching to a God who is sovereign. Notice I didn’t use that word here but you could have.

You need to rest in God’s sovereignty. What does that mean? He’s managing all things. Is there mystery in that? Absolutely. Are we going to get into that some more? We will. Lord willing this summer as we work through Romans 9. But for now can we rest in his management that your life may look like a messed up stew of bizarreness. How is that sentence? It’s really God at work to bring you safely into his presence. And maybe with John Newton you can say this, this old old hymn. With this I’m done. Be gone my unbelief. My savior is near. And for my relief he will shortly appear. By prayer let me wrestle and he will perform with Christ in the vessel I’ll smile at the storm. Though dark be my way since he is my guide. It’s mine to obey and it’s his to provide.
Though cisterns be broken and all creatures fail. The word he has spoken will surely prevail. Since all that I meet shall work for my good the bitter is sweet and the medicine food. Though painful at present till cease before long and then oh how pleasant the conquers song. It is painful at present for a lot of us maybe more for one life than the next but we need to recognize that God is sovereign and he’s at work in your life. And that’s more time than you allotted me so let us stand and pray and then I’ll let you get on to lunch.

Pray with me. God, it is a real mind blowing concept that you take sinful decisions like the men that beat up Jesus Christ, jammed a crown a thorns into his brow and took a stick and beat him. It’s amazing how you take such horrible sinful evil decisions and work out your perfect will which in that case included the fact that I would never be on the receiving end of the wrath of God. Thank you that your sovereign plan is directing it all and that everything in our lives, the sin that has been sinned against us, the failures in my own life, the painful things that you sovereignly bring into our lives are all apart of your perfect plan and you’re working all things together. I hope that can be said for the vast majority of people here because they are confident that they do love the God of the Bible and they are called according to his purpose. May today be a day that we examine ourselves to be sure of that and then we reveal in the truth that we are the focus of an infinitely wise God who is working even the painful things out for good in our lives. Thanks for that. We commit ourselves a fresh to you now and just reveling in that truth in Jesus name. Amen.