



**Prelude to the Cross-Part 1**  
**God's Good Plan**  
**Pastor Mike Fabarez**

So tell me do they still have prizes in cereal boxes? I was told they don't have those anymore. I don't know what happened, maybe the kids were eating the toys or something. Not that I eat a lot of cereal but I'll tell you that was really the highlight as a kid to be able to get to the box of cereal first, crack that thing open and get the little toy car out or, you know, maybe the glow in the dark spoon, maybe you remember that one, or the plastic whistle, little Army men, or even remember getting the license plate for your bike that was in the cereal box was always fun. Well, I don't know, but I think that Decoder Ring was probably the staple of all cereal box prizes. The Decoder Ring. That's going way back before my time but they still had them when I was a kid and one way or another you were stuck reading the back of the cereal box when you're eating your cereal in the morning and it was good to have a challenge, some kind of weird message that's all coded on the back and you could take out that decoder ring or the decoder card and you could figure out all the weird characters and, you know, decipher the message that was there for you on the back of a box. I thought of that and, you know, they were always kind of lame because they were really cheap, but I thought of that because of downloading the Google Translate app. Now, if you haven't done this yet, the element they have in it now where you can click on the camera... We have free Wi-Fi, you might want to try this out right now. Click on the camera and then you can..., you'd have to find some foreign language, you take the camera and just put it over the foreign language and just magically it takes whatever that language is, if you download the data set, and BAM, it turns it into readable English for you. It is amazing. I mean, when I did that I thought that's the kind of decoder ring that you want. You just point it, and there it is. I mean, it's like magic.

Well, I thought of that if only we had an app like that for the Bible. Oh, I know you've got an English Bible and all that but if you just take an English passage that's difficult and hard, some kind of tough doctrine maybe you found in the middle of this book, and you just take your phone with some bible app that decodes everything, put it over the top and then instantly you have this nice, easy to understand concept. Now, we don't have an app like that and you may say, "Oh, that's what a commentary does." No, don't let anybody tell you we have something that will do that and make every doctrine of the Bible easy and palatable and, you know, you can understand it without any trouble. That's not the case at all. Matter of fact, there are some parts of Scripture that our finite minds just have a hard time understanding and figuring out, no matter how smart you are. I can think of the Apostle Paul, for instance, who, I think is a genius in his own right, clearly used by God to write the Bible, knows a lot about theology, knows God intimately, lives a godly, pious Christian life. And yet when he's writing about some of these doctrines in Romans 11 he breaks out in verse 33 and he says, "Oh, the riches of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable are his ways!" Unsearchable. Can't figure out that decision. Inscrutable are his ways. It's beyond comprehension. It's not that God is illogical. It's not that God doesn't make sense. It's just that God is a God who often times has revealed himself to be doing things or says things about himself that for us are just very, very difficult for us to understand. There's no easy way to kind of break it down into a kind of nice and easy to digest kind of concept. It's just not, some things are very tough.

Now as we study verse by verse through the Gospel of Luke, we've reached a passage like that in our study today, believe it or not. Luke Chapter 22 verses 1 through 6 is all we'll get through today. But when you look at a passage like that, you may be turning to it now saying, "Well, I understand this, we're getting in to the Passion Week of Christ." Believe me, when you say that you need a little



decoder app for that because "passion" does not mean what you think it means if you think passion means how we use it in the English language. This is a transliteration of the Latin word, which is the Bible word for over a thousand years of the church, "Passio" means "suffering." The Passion of Christ, we mean the suffering of Christ.

And if I say, why is that so hard to understand, I just need you to slow down, Christian, Sunday School grad, and really think about what we're saying. We're looking at a passage of Scripture where we've just learned that Jesus is doing miracles, he's a good person, he's always doing the right thing, he's a man doing wonders from God. I mean, this is a man who has done everything right. And yet he's willing to suffer? Yeah, he is going to suffer at the hands of the chief priests and the scribes and the officials of Israel. And it's going to be a horrific death. And you say, "I've already decoded that section of the Bible, Pastor Mike. I understand that the cross of Christ is the best thing in the universe. Christ did for us there something magnificent, we sing about it, you know, we write songs and poetry about it, we worship him for it. It's fantastic. Matter of fact, the apex of the Christian calendar is something we call Good Friday, the day that Christ was crucified." Now, again, if you think that way, I think you've kind of gilded your thoughts because you've grown up in church or you haven't really stepped outside of what you're really saying in that Christian bubble, and that is you're talking about the torturing crucifixion of a person.

And I think our thoughts are gilded because our cross is gilded and often times hanging around our neck or it's nicely embroidered on some kind of a bookmark in our Bible or our Bible cover, and we don't realize what we've got hanging around our neck and what we're really thinking about when we think about a cross. This is a Roman execution rack. It's a horrible way to die. It would be like coming to church and in the front of the pulpit, maybe like a lot of churches, you've got the symbol of that execution. Maybe instead you've got like an electric chair here. Would that...? You'd think about maybe going to another church at that point. Or over the choir loft you've got a noose hanging from the ceiling, you know, just kind of reminding us of people being hung. Or maybe in the lobby or out in front maybe on the top of the steeple out there, you got a guillotine up there, you know, and a little bucket, a basket to catch the head that's being decapitated. What are you talking about? Oh no, Good Friday's coming. We remember the torture and execution of the person.

Well, in our passage we're going to get into the Last Supper. Or even that, the Last Supper, you'd think of it as the da Vinci's painting or something. If I said, "A person's about to have their final meal before their execution," you'd think of it differently than, "Hey, we're going to study the Last Supper before Christ goes to the cross."

Now these are the things you may say, "Now I understand the cross is certainly something that I've decoded and even though it's gruesome I got to stand back and say, yeah, it takes decoding, because on the surface, it's a bad thing. Because in essence, if I asked you, we're getting into the passion section of the Christ here, is that a good thing or a bad thing, I hope you'd say, well, I need to slow down and tell you it is a good thing but it's a bad thing. It's a bad thing because the innocent ones suffer but it's a good thing because I know theologically what it means.

Well glance at the passage we're going to study today. I mean, here you have the bad guys, the chief priests and the scribes. Now, if I said are those good guys or bad guys, I don't think you'd go, "Oh, these are the good guys, the good guys of Israel," like you'd say, "Good Friday is the day that Christ died." You'd say they're bad guys. And even if you'd kind of say, "Well, I know they're part of God's plan," let's get to verse 3 there, glance at that, you have the word Satan there. Now I'm not trying to trick you but "good guy or bad guy," interactive church? "Bad guy." Right? Or what about this guy: Judas? "Bad guy." I looked through the roles of our church and we don't have one Judas.



We have a lot of Matthews, we got a lot of Michaels, we got a lot of Johns in our church. We don't have one Judas in the nursery, not a single Judas in the cribs down there. Not! A lot of babies being born in our church this week, no one was saying, "John or Judas? I don't know. My wife likes Judas, I like John." Never. Bad guy, bad guy. And yet look at the juxtapositions of the two phrases on your work sheet, if you've got it out, the title of the message: "Prelude to the Cross."

If I said, it's the path to the guillotine, it's the road to the noose, to the hangman's noose. I mean, that would sound different and you'd say, "Oh, that a bad thing but God uses it for good." And if I said, "Oh, now let's look at the characters. Judas, the betrayer, on the inside, who sells them out for money." Good guy or bad guy? "Well, bad guy, but I guess you put that subtitle there, I guess I got to see that there's a good plan working its way out here." See, that's what I'm trying to force you in a passage of Scripture that maybe you're so Christianize, as a Sunday school grad, you don't even see what we're studying, that this is a major problem. Judas now is about to betray Christ. Satan is filling him to have him betray Christ. The chief priests and the scribes are going to have their way. The officials of Israel are going to carry out an unjust, horrible plot to kill an innocent person. And yet this is the best part of the Bible. It's the best thing God ever did.

And all these evil characters, God is using them, orchestrating something like a chemist at a pharmacy compounding things that, in themselves, might be poison, to put something together to cure the ills of humanity. Not in some sociological sense but in a theological sense. People who should hear from God, "Depart from me, I never knew you" into the accursed fire that you deserved and earned by your own sin. But instead, he's going to say, "Welcome into the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

How could you ever get sinners to be justified? Well, it's going to take guys like Judas, it's going to take people like the chief priests, the scribes. It's even going to, believe it or not, it's going to involve Satan. Even his name means adversary, he's against all that is good. Yep, he is against all that's good you're going to say he's a bad guy, just like you can say Judas is a bad guy. But if it weren't for Judas, if it weren't for Satan, if it weren't for the chief priests and scribes, I mean, the good plan of God wouldn't have been carried out. Now this is a hard truth. At some point I think if you think about it long enough you're going to stand back and say, "Oh, the riches of the wisdom and the knowledge of God, how unsearchable are his judgments how inscrutable are his ways." How can God take these bad things and use them for good? Let's read the passage and let's make some observations. See if we can't only understand God's great big plan in the crucifixion of Christ and then maybe some of God's good plans in your life when some satanic things start taking place.

First one, "Now the Feast of the Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover." Now, Luke, of course, is writing to not just Jewish people who would know this, he's explaining this for a lot of Greeks and gentiles who wouldn't otherwise know it, and for us, of course, we need to learn this from people. On the left side of your Bible, you know a little bit about this, they go together, the seven day feast that follows the Passover is called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. When the chief priests during this time and everyone's drawing near, it's a pilgrimage feast, a lot of people in Jerusalem at the time, "the scribes, they're seeking how to put him to death," but there were so many people and a lot of people hanging on every word of Christ. "They feared the people." Who knows what would happen if they just openly took Christ and had him killed.

Well Satan is going to step in and accommodate that request. "Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was one of the number of the twelve." I mean, the minor chords of this keep getting worse. It's just like, "Whoa, this is so dark." He was in the inner circle, so trusted in the inner circle that he was the treasurer of the disciples. They gave him the moneybag. He's going to be the bad

guy? This is horrible. "He went away and conferred with the chief priests and the officers how he might betray him to them. And they were glad." It's like a bunch of demons gleefully, joyfully, laughing and rubbing their hands together at the evil they are about to foist on the holy one and they "agreed to give him money," 40 pieces of silver as you know. So much a part of God's plan that even that was in the prophetic word of the Old Testament. And "so he consented and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of the crowd," let's make sure the bad guys get away with this without getting lynched by the whole crowd here. That's insidious evil. No, it is evil but this is the prelude to the cross. You've already decoded that part. I just want you to see that these elements are falling right into the hands of God's good plan.

Let's make an observation about verse 1, the "Feast of the Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover." A few special things going on in my life this week, as you know, my son is getting married this afternoon, so we had a little rehearsal dinner at a nice restaurant, which I don't normally go to. Before that, I think it was on Thursday... I think it was, I shouldn't say that, my wife's anniversary and my anniversary, 32 years, I should remember that, 31st of May. So what was that? Wednesday? This is not that I forgot the date, it's May 31st, I just didn't remember which day of the week it was, and we went to a super nice restaurant and that was nice. And you know, both these restaurants started with that basket of bread. And it was a feast. But I'll tell you what, I want it leavened. I want it leavened. I want some yeast in that bread. It's the best kind, nice and warm out of the ovens, all fluffy. It's so good. It's a feast, a feast of leavened bread. I could have one of those. You know what I can't quite make sense of? A feast of unleavened bread. No. I've had that. No thanks. Oh, and I know this feast of unleavened bread where you're not allowed to have any of that good fluffy bread, which everyone likes. It's not like the Israelites just like this stuff. They had something good made worse that they had to eat.

And it followed the Passover and you know the Passover, don't you? We've already started with you on Good Friday showing you, in some memorable ways, I hope, that you took an animal from the field, had him live among you in your house, and then while your little chubby fingers of your toddler grow accustomed to this lamb that was almost like a pet, this one year old lamb without blemish, and now you've pried that animal away who'd become a pet in your home and at twilight as the sun went down you took a knife across its throat and cut it open and killed it in front of your children. And then you put the blood that you'd want to kind of keep off of you and off of your furniture and off of your house, you took it and painted the doorposts. Why? Because it was a night of death. And everyone in this whole place in Egypt is going to die.

Oh, now every year after that night of death we're going to remember that night of death and it's going to start a Feast of Unleavened Bread. Oh, and by the way the meal that you start the feast with, you start with, here it comes, ready, bitter herbs. Now I had cheesecake this week at the rehearsal dinner and I had chocolate layered cake for my anniversary. I've gained at least five pounds this week. But man, it was good. And I ate the whole thing just in honor of my anniversary and my son's wedding. I ate it all. I even took the fork and pressed it into the crumbs around the cheesecake and tried to do it when no one was watching me. Oh, it's so good. Talk about breaking your diet, that was so good.

You know what I don't want in my feast? I don't want bitter herbs. I mean, I don't even like the veggies, I certainly don't want bitter herbs. That's not going to be part of any kind of commemoration I'm going to enjoy. And then you know one other thing I liked? I liked the fact that we got seated on our anniversary meal in a corner booth that had leather seats, a leather seat and then the upholstered back and it was really high and it was quiet. I didn't want to put my feet up on anything but I felt like this is just awesome. I wanted the waiter just to feed me the filet mignon.

This is great.

Now do you know anything about the Passover? Not only can you not eat it reclining, how it was described in Scripture is you're to eat it standing up. Here are the words of Scripture. "Eat it in haste with your staff in your hand," your walking stick and take your clothes, you know, you don't unfurl your robe like you would if you were going to dine, you tuck up your robe inside your belt as though you're going to go running somewhere. This is a celebration? This is the holiday? I mean give me Memorial Day or Labor Day where I can heat the barbecue up, where we can all sit back in lawn chairs and that's my kind of feast. I don't want to eat unleavened bread and sit there and eat this roasted lamb that was our pet. I can hear them wailing. My kids named him and I'm eating him. I don't want to do that. And I can't even sit down and enjoy the meal, I got to stand up.

The bad scene in Egypt in the 15th century B.C. was to be remembered with a really oxymoronic kind of feast, as though it were a party at a wedding reception. It's not. This was a reminder of something bad. And why did we have this? Because God freed us out of Egypt. Oh, and then again they sinned and so everyone that was freed and cheering on the way out with all those chariots, you know, in the Red Sea, now they're dropping like flies in the wilderness. They're dying. They didn't even make it to the Promised Land. Even our leader, Moses, died in the wilderness. I mean, this isn't a happy scene.

And yet this was the history of lambs being killed that we were accustomed to, eating bitter herbs, standing up. Remember this. Remember this release from physical enslavement into the desert and then ultimately into the Promised Land, even that was imperfect led by leaders who weren't perfect. Just remember all of this ups and downs and imperfect stuff from history, because all this history is linear and it's heading toward one thing. And here's the word, if you want a biblical word for it, the redemption of mankind, the redemption of God's people. Number one on your outline if you're taking notes and I wish you would, you need to "Understand God's Good Plan in History." They're sitting down to remember a time in Israel that was not happy, with a meal that's really not happy. Oh, and I know, Israel wins and so we're commemorating the freedom of Israel from Egypt. But really it's just a low point in Israel where God spares them and then takes them in the desert.

Unfortunately, because of their unbelief, a lot of them die, and all of this is a reminder ultimately of something God promised at the very beginning in Genesis Chapter 3. One day I'm going to fix your real problem, the problem that you caused by your rebellion and sin. And even the first reminder of that, think this through, was them being covered. The Hebrew word is "atonement" but it's translated "cover." To cover them by killing an animal. Can you imagine their eyes, Adam and Eve, the first time they saw the death of an animal, and to cover them with those skins and to make the promise that one day, through the woman, there will be one who would fix the problem and Satan himself would be crushed? All of that was all about things that would remind them, sometimes in very painful kinds of reminders, whether it was the death of those animals to put clothes on Adam and Eve, or whether it was the death of that Paschal or that lamb that was killed for the Passover that was really loved by my family and my children, or whether it was eating bitter herbs or whether it was remembering the bitter times in Israel's history. It was all to allow us to prepare ourselves to embrace the one that John would look at, John the baptizer, and say, "There is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world."

All linear, a redemptive history in the Bible to get us to see that what really matters is you and I getting right with the living God so that you never have to hear, "Depart from me I never knew you."



Now I do have to have you look at this one passage, Acts Chapter 2. I want to show you this to again paint the picture of something that I think you've already decoded and that is that Good Friday was a day when Jesus was tortured and killed, and you've kind of gotten over that, you understand it. Now I'm trying to get you to the details of it, the instrumentality of the bad players in it even being used for good. And we'll get that and we're working on that in our minds. But I want to show you this passage and make this point with the first point on our outline. And that is in verse 22 of Acts Chapter 2 in the middle of Peter's sermon, he starts out by reminding us that Jesus of Nazareth was attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, you yourself have seen it, everyone's going, "Yea! Jesus healing people, raising people from the dead. It's awesome. He's our hero. Great, great, great." Bottom of verse 23. "This Jesus, you crucified and killed him by the hands of lawless men." Again we have the juxtaposition of a good innocent man doing all these miracles now being killed by a bunch of people who hate God and don't keep his rules. Killed him, crucified him, which is tortured and killed. That's what crucified is, crucifixion is the process of torturing someone until they die.

So, you have a man doing the best things anyone has ever done. He's going around doing good as the gospel writers puts it and he was tortured and killed by lawless people. Look in the middle of that, top of verse 23, sandwiched between those two reminders is this phrase "this Jesus, delivered up according to..." Now in the Greek sentence, you could just use the word "plan" which is there. But he adds a very strong word in front of it. The "definite plan," the unchanging plan, the decreed plan, the plan that God had set forth and the "foreknowledge of God." It was no surprise, he understood it, he planned it, he was in love with the plan, and he said this is the plan to fix the problem that started in the Garden. "The definite plan and foreknowledge of God."

Ask the question. Is the crucifixion of Christ a good thing or a bad thing? "Well, it's a trick question Pastor Mike." Well, yeah, I guess it kind of is. Before you put the decoder ring in front of it, before you put the app in front of it, it's a bad thing, an innocent man dies at the hands of lawless men, tortured and killed. And yet, I recognize God had planned it that way. The back of the cereal box looked like a bunch of squiggly lines and a whole mess of characters. But that is God's plan to look exactly like that. Why? So that when you put over the top of it the lens of redemption and you understand where history is going, you see this for what it is. It is a good thing.

It is the best thing that ever happened. It is the thing that God definitely planned from the beginning to heal, to fix, to repair, to restore, to cure, to forgive, to correct, to free us from the penalty of our sin. It is God's redemptive plan. It is the mixing, as I put it earlier, of a chemist in a pharmacy with a bunch of things that may individually kill you. It is the terrible, poisonous effects of sin and it's all mixed together to be the elixir, to be the healing, to take in our lives out what we would otherwise not have fixed in our lives, the sins that should condemn us. It's a bitter pill, I understand. The shot doesn't feel good, but it is, as Colossians 2 says, to make us alive with Christ, forgiving our trespasses, "canceling the record of our debt that stood against us with its legal demands. He set it aside by nailing it to an execution rack," nailing it to something that would be a torture item from the Middle Ages, even worse than that, the cross.

And before I make this even more personal maybe I should ask you just not in the long view of history, how did God use the ups and downs, the terrible things, the good things, the wars, the peace time, all to get people ready to embrace the redemptive act of Christ. Not just in history, because it happened 2,000 years ago but even us, working through all the history that we have, God overseeing it, orchestrating it, just being the one who is the leader and the manager of it all to get people to say, you need Christ. This is about Christ's redemption.



But let's make that not the long view of history but just your life. Has God use the pain in your life to bring you to the place of embracing the redemption in Christ? I mean, isn't it part of a lot of people's testimony, if I were to open mic, they'd get up here and say, "Yeah, you know what, a lot of pain, a lot of Satan's work, a lot of activity of the demonic forces, if you really want to be honest about it, that lie behind the flesh and blood that were really not wrestling against but the principalities and powers and the evil in this world, lead me to the place of embracing redemption in Christ. I'll bet you'd have stories like that in this room.

The Apostle Paul had a story like that. Is it good to be riding on your horse and get knocked off your horse and be struck blind and have your eyes crust over to where you can't see and have to be led around? As an intelligent doctor, you know, you're a super smart professor, you're a leader, you're an up and coming Pharisee and you can't even see. That's a bad thing. But it was Paul's blindness, was it not, that led him to repentance. I mean, God used something horrible. And I bet there's a lot of things in your life that clearly are not good, they're evil, that you could say, led me to embrace the redemption in Christ. God's good plan in history is to bring people face-to-face with the need that they have to embrace Christ.

We have to look back, whether it is the Passover, whether it's the Babylonian captivity, whether it's the Vietnam war, whether it's some kind of problem in our society, whether it's something that happened to you last year or last week, and say God is leading us to embrace Christ. Maybe you say, "I have. Fantastic. Now I'm a Christian, now everything will be cool, God can lay off letting all this evil happen in my life."

Number two on your outline, if you look at verses 2 through 6 and, I understand, this is about Christ, it's about Christ's crucifixion, it's about the setup for the betrayal. Well, in this passage, let me just say, we're going to spend a lot of time looking at the Last Supper, the crucifixion, and even Judas and his betrayal. It's coming. But let me take this introductory paragraph here and say, can we look at that as a paradigm for things even in our own life? And I don't mean to diminish the big plan that God is carrying out in Luke 22. I understand that. But can we see that God uses the Judas, the Satan, the chief officials, the chief priests and the scribes and all of these bad guys, and he's working out his good plan. And while they're bad and they're evil and evil is always evil, it's being used for good and say, let's just step back and just affirm the truth that the sovereignty of God in Christ's life is the same kind of sovereignty that is exercised in your life. Now that's a big statement but let me prove it to you.

The sovereignty that is exercised over every step in the path that leads Christ to Gethsemane to pray and not get out of that terrible cup that he's got to drink and to go to the cross, and before that to be beaten and whipped and tortured, is all a part of God's sovereign plan for his life. And let me say he's got a sovereign plan for your life.

Matthew 10 would be a good example of this. God brings it down to the birds in the tree in your backyard. He said, "there's not a single bird that falls apart from your Father." The picture is a bird keeling over and croaking and dying in your backyard. And when that happens, you do, especially if you're a woman, you go "Oh, so sad." It happened in our backyard not long ago. My daughter, my wife, and I know, I don't mean to say I'm callous but, you know, "OK, I've got to clean it up," whatever, but there's a bird that died and they have that sympathetic moment and I think, OK, but they get over and get back to doing whatever they're doing. So, I understand that.

But I'm thinking, if you're the bird, that's a bad day for you for sure, you're dead. If you're married to the bird, now you're a widow. That's a bad day. The bird is dead. And God says, "that didn't



happen apart from your Father." And the next verse says, and you know what, that kind of sovereignty... Look at your life. Are you not worth many sparrows? And he says, in fact, even the hairs on your head are all numbered. Talk about the extent of God's concern for our life. It's not just the day you keel over and die. It's every single follicle, and if a follicle, and I've got several that are dying and not producing hair, then "not apart from your Father."

Every single thing down to the tiny little hairs on my head or under the purview and the management of God's sovereignty. And you know what, when follicles die, or my wife dies, or when I die, the Bible makes it clear "not apart from your Father."

Let me make this statement: as awkward as it may sound to people who aren't really thoughtful about the Bible, when Job buried his children because a horrible storm came and crushed them all, Job... And it's clear, do you know Job, Chapter 1? This was all provoked by a conversation between Satan and God. And if I were to ask, "Who killed Job's children?" What would you say? Well, the text is clear, Satan did. Is this a good thing or a bad thing? "Double thumbs down, Mike. It's really bad." So Job worships God in great grief and sorrow, and he says, "the Lord has given and Satan has taken away." Next time you're in that passage you might want to turn to that and highlight that section. "Satan has taken away." Now that's what happened, was it not? No, check your Bible. But see, Job understood something about the sovereignty of God and the instrumentality of the death of his children, that was Satan and it was bad. Ask Job, was Satan good or bad? "Bad." He understands that death is not the work of God in a positive sense, not the direct agency of God. God is not one that is all about that. He takes no pleasure even in the death of the wicked, let alone the righteous.

And yet he says, "The Lord has given and," you know, we put in the lyrics of our songs, "and the Lord has taken away." I just wonder if you can get down to the details of your life and recognize this: that God is involved in that. Then let me add this verse on top of it all, because I know you know it and you're afraid I'm going to quote it, but here it comes, Romans 8:28. You need to know that "God works together for good all things to those who love him and are called according to his purpose." God works together for good EVERYTHING.

Now it is qualified, "To those who love God and are called according to his purpose." And if you're not, I have no hope for you. You can just surf the Internet for the rest of the sermon because I don't know what to say to you. But if you're a Christian and you sit here today, you say, "I love God. I am called according to his purpose, I'm his child," then I am saying, great. All of history in the past in a big sense used to bring people to focus on and embrace the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," in your life you may have had some pain even that led you to Christ and you have embraced Christ. Now, I'm saying let's unleash you in your Christian life. You're going to live your Christian life and since you became a Christian, I'm just saying this, clearly God has made this clear, not only everything prior to your conversion to lead you to Christ, now as a Christian, God says, "All things work together for good." All things work together for good. Even down to the follicles in your head. Even if it were the birds in your yard or the kids in the bedroom down the hall, "nothing is apart from your Father." "Yeah, but those are bad things."

Now here's the simplistic counterpart that you're up against. The non-Christian who thinks he's a Christian, who talks about Christianity, says God is for the good things, Satan is for the bad things. God gives you the good things, Satan does the bad things. I guess they think they're kind of fighting it out in heaven somewhere and, you know, "Satan won today, God will win tomorrow." That's not how it works. As others have said Satan is God's Satan, as weird as that sounds. The leash, read Job 1 again. The leash is only extended as far as God's sovereignty allows it to be extended. You got problems? You got trials? You got things that are really evil? You got the cancer? You broke your





toe? You failed the test? You had someone come against you, you got a law suit, you got someone doing something bad to you or your family members? I'm just telling you "nothing happens apart from your Father," and that's a hard doctrine. What do we call it? I haven't even used the word yet. God is "sovereign" over all those things. The sovereignty of God.

And here's the promise for you. Just like in this passage, though I know I almost feel blasphemous taking Christ's sovereignty and making something we can learn about God's sovereignty in our lives, that God is sovereign over his life, but I do need to... I'm your pastor, so let me spend a little bit of time saying you need to, number two, you need to have the faith to "Trust God for Good Results in Troubles." And "troubles" may be a small word for what you're facing, but I guarantee you it's no greater than the troubles Christ was facing when his inner circle man named Judas, who they trusted as the treasure, was willing to sell him out for forty pieces of silver, kiss him in the Garden so he could identify him as the bad guy, have him hauled off, tortured and crucified. That's a bad, bad situation and yet I'm telling you right now, Satan himself and Judas himself, the chief priests and the scribes and the officials, all of them, pawns in God's good plans for Christ and ultimately for us.

And I'm saying this, whatever you're up against, God is working it together for good. How can that be? I have no time for this, but let me give you a few reasons why the Bible would tell us these things work out for good. Ready? Eight. "Eight things?" Yes. We're going to be done around 3 this afternoon. No, eight things. If I were a Puritan it will be 88 things, but just eight things. I'll give you eight passages and eight quick statements.

First Peter Chapter 1:7. What's the good that God could be working in the troubles in your life? What's his good sovereign plan? What good could it possibly...? Here's one thing: First Peter Chapter 1 verse 7, "the assurance of your faith." "What? I'm okay being kind of ambivalent about..." No, you need to be sure. You need to be sure because there's two ways people die and cross the threshold from this life to the next, there are non-Christians kicking and screaming and terrified, and people who can say with the Apostle Paul, "for me to live is Christ but to die is gain."

Now, I've been in this ministry thing long enough to know, I don't have to just read that book I often recommend to you the "Last Words of Saints and Sinners" to see the radical divide between Christians dying and non-Christians dying. But I'm just telling you, I want to have an assurance of faith when I'm at the end of my rope, whether I'm dying in a car accident or laying on a gurney or in some old person's home and breathing my last, I want to make sure I know where I'm going. The assurance of faith is something that, according to First Peter Chapter 1 verse 7, is something that is given to me because of affliction. And those afflictions, because they're bad, they don't come from God's direct hand, it's God allowing these things through the intermediary or the instrumentality of bad people and bad things and maybe even Satan and his henchmen himself, demons doing things in my life, but God's going, "I'm working it all out." And one thing I'm doing is giving you the assurance of your faith, which the Bible says is more precious to you than gold, it should be.

The Bible says would be better for you to have absolute assurance as to where you stand with Christ and where you're going than it would be for you to have a bunch of money in your bank account. Trust God for the good results in your trouble. Here's one good result, assurance of faith.

Letter B, number two: how about this: "a greater ministry." God wants you to ministry to people, to do good in their lives. Second Corinthians Chapter 1 verse 4. Gods says this: "God is the one who comforts us in all of our afflictions so that we are able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." That's a mouthful, but did you

follow it? You know the person I want to direct me through and guide me through a creepy, dark forest in the middle of the night? Someone who's been through it before. I want a guy who knows where he's going. And when God takes you through the dark valley of the shadow of death, he's just equipping you, preparing you to be a minister in his church, to do something in the lives of other people, to disciple people, to walk them through it. Bad things happen in your marriage? Bad things happen in your health? Bad things happen in your relationships? Bad things happen at work? All of those work out for good. Why? Because God is preparing you to bring comfort, direction, to be a light and a guide to people going through those same things. This world is filled with people who are hurting like that.

As a matter of fact, you might direct them through those dark times as non-Christians to lead them to Christ because you've walked through those things. There's not a single thing that happens, there's not a bird that falls from the tree without God's oversight. And part of that for Christians is producing good by you being prepared for greater ministry. The greater the pain, often times, the greater the ministry God can accomplish through you. As Spurgeon liked to say, he said, "It is rare that anyone is used greatly by God until he hurts them deeply," which may sound to you like "what?" He's not the direct cause of those things but the instrumentality may be all kinds of evil people and evil circumstances and terrible things like sickness, and yet he uses those things to prepare people to do ministry. How can God use troubles in your life, whether it's the Judas betraying you or some painful encounter, it pales next to the cross. But clearly, that kind of thing in your life will give you assurance of faith, greater ministry.

Letter C, how about this: "it can drive you to repentance." There may be some sin in your life you need to repent of. Maybe I should put this word next to it, "introspection." It will lead you to a kind of self-analysis where you will cry out to God, "search me, try me, see if there's any wicked way in me." That's the kind of purity God wants to purify in your life. He wants to make you a more Christ-like person. And here's the thing, you can have it on your list every single day, "pray to see if there's anything in my life that's offensive to God." And I guarantee you, you're not going to pray that the same way, you're not going to be the same kind of introspective person, until you have pain in your life.

I guarantee you, I can go all week long having it on my prayer list saying, "God, I want to make sure I'm right with you." But when I get the flu, I guarantee you, I'm going to be talking with God, "is there anything in my life at all that you want me to fix." Pain has a way, affliction has a way, opposition, criticism, cancer, scary kinds of situations, loss of my finances, those are the things God can get you to say, "Okay God, wait, is there anything in my life?"

Sometimes it's connected with discipline. Hebrews Chapter 12. If you want a passage for this, although Hebrews 12 would be a good one, Judges Chapter 10 verses 9 and 10. "The Ammonites crossed the Jordan. They come up against Judah, Benjamin and Ephraim. And Israel was so severely distressed that," here's what happened, "the people cried out to the Lord and they said, 'we've sinned against you, we've forsaken our God and we've served the Baals,'" the idols. Why weren't they thinking that when all was good, when there was no threat on the borders? Because that's the problem with prosperity and comfort and ease and all the things you pray for every day. If you had them all and you had no affliction, I guess you would probably not be as introspective and praying with a kind of sincerity and a kind of sensitivity to say, "God, if there is any wicked way in me show it to me. I want to get rid of it." God needs holy people to proclaim a holy message about a holy God.

He wants you to be repentant and introspective and sometimes pain will do that for you like nothing

else will. As Thomas Watson said, I think I put his book on the back of the worksheet, he says, "Sometimes the sick bed teaches far more than a sermon ever could." We learn a lot more in our pain than even in a good Christian book.

Number four, letter D: "it can drive us to prayer." It can make us people of prayer. We read this in our Daily Bible Reading this week, Second Chronicles Chapter 6 verse 29. I always pause in this verse when I read it in Second Chronicles. If you read it with me, maybe you paused on it as well. Chapter 6 verse 29 Second Chronicles. Solomon is dedicating the temple. He just built this magnificent building. He talks about praying and he's talking about a lot of things you might imagine, when we're in trouble, when we have, you know, wars, when there's pestilence in the land. And then he makes this statement, it's interesting. He says, "And whatever prayer, Lord, whatever plea is made by any person, by anyone in Israel, each knowing his own affliction and his own sorrow, stretching out his hands toward this house will then hear from heaven and answer him." Interesting. The provocation for prayer, for saying, "God, I want to communion with you, I want to ask you, I want to talk to you." "Knowing their own affliction and their own sorrow."

I'm just telling you, you cannot be, I don't think, a man of prayer, a woman of prayer, without a lot of prompting of some of the difficulties, pain and even the evil that you'll encounter in your life. I never pray more ardently than when there's really evil things happening in and around me or my family. I start praying. Matter of fact, praying and fasting was not a discipline they put on the schedule, unless it was the one day a year in Yom Kippur every year in Israel. It was usually a reaction to a kind of crisis. They reached out to God with such ardency in their praying that they gave up food, they didn't eat. Second Chronicles 6:29. It drives us to prayer.

Number five, letter E: "to safeguard against sin." It's a safeguard against sin. The evil that you encounter in your life might be the very thing that keeps you from committing adultery. It might be the thing that keeps you from cheating, you know, at your job or lying or somehow embezzling money. The pain in your life can be the kind of safeguard that keeps you from sin. Here's a passage, Second Corinthians Chapter 12 verse 7. Paul has a thorn in the flesh, which is some kind of physical ailment, and he prays, "Please, take it away, please take it away, please take it away." God says, "No, no, no, my grace is sufficient, my favor is enough for you." What was that all about? To keep you from boasting because of the great revelations you've been shown. The thorn popped, if you will, any swelling head of pride in Paul. There are things that would have happened with a prideful apostle and God said, "No, I'm going to prevent this by safeguarding your life with illness." You've got chronic pain? You got some kind of opposition?

I'm just telling you, maybe the thing that because you're on your knees dealing with that affliction and you've got that sorrow and you've got that difficulty, you've had that terrible thing in your past, those are the things that may keep you from being someone who would just walk right into sinful temptation and right into some kind of trashing of your Christian life, because you've experienced those troubles.

Number six, letter F: It can just, in a general sense, which is I think is related to number five. "It can teach you to hate sin." Why are things happening sometimes in our world, why do you feel like you look at TV, you see the news, and you say, we live in Sodom and Gomorrah. Why does God let this happen?" Maybe part of this, in your life, in seeing these things, whether it's in your environment or in our culture, is so you can learn to hate the thing that put Christ on a cross. We can never be the Church of Christ, all about what Christ is about, until you learn to hate the sin that nailed Christ to a cross. And it certainly is part of a safeguard against sin. A verse for that, how about Galatians Chapter 6 verse 8, "The one who sows to his flesh reaps from the flesh corruption." Maybe you've



seen that in this society. Maybe a Christian in your life, you've seen them wipe out and that kind of sowing to the flesh and reaping makes you think I hate the fact that this happens. I hate the fact that these things took place. I can't stand the fact, I loathe it, that's exactly where God's people need to be. We certainly need to hate sin a whole lot more than we do.

Number seven: James Chapter 1 verses 2 through 4. "God needs strong Christians." Nothing strengthens our character like trials, pain, affliction. James Chapter 1 verse 2 says, amazingly enough, first four words in English, "Count it all joy..." Count it complete joy. Count it super-duper joy. Really? "When you encounter trials of all kinds." That is hard to do when someone diagnoses you with some kind of illness, to stand up and give the doctor a high five. But the Bible says, you know that that trial that you've just walk through the portal and you think this is bad, cancer is of Satan. I'm not saying it's not. I'm not saying those aren't right thoughts, to hate the evil and you hate the sin and you hate the affliction and you hate the opposition and you hate the demonic stuff and, you know, I get all that.

But the Bible says, one thing it might be doing for you is "producing steadfastness," strength. Let that steadfastness, that strength, that endurance "have its full effect, so that you can be perfect, complete, lacking in nothing." Those high schoolers go into that gym, they work out in that weight room and they get all bulked up to go out on the field and do battle on the gridiron. And all I'm saying is all of that pain in the preparatory process of bulking up and pumping away, it's so they can get ready to do the war. And you know, you've got a war as a Christian, you are a soldier of Christ. You cannot be strong in this battle that God has called you to in evangelism and discipleship and avoiding sin, unless you strengthen your character and God unleashes, sometimes, a lot of pain in our lives to see that.

Lastly, what is that? Number eight, letter H: "Sometimes it has nothing to do with your benefit." Maybe it's the benefit of others. He works out his big plan in your environment, he's working out a plan somewhere around you and in your life and for the good of other people. Genesis Chapter 50 verse 20, you know the story, Joseph is there, his brothers are afraid that Joseph is going to take some kind of revenge on them and he says, "Chill out. Listen, no problem. Don't worry about it. You hated me. You spoke against me, you lied about me to our father, you threw me in a pit, you sold me as a slave to a bunch of marauding caravanning people and you did all of that." And he says, "you meant it for evil," verse 20 of Genesis 50, "but God meant it for good." You meant it as an evil act and you know what I'm going to say, "it was an evil act." No, it is an evil act. I'm not saying it wasn't evil. I don't want any of you to sell your brother as a slave. That's a bad thing. But even if that were to happen and you're a child of God, the Bible is very clear, God will mean that for good.

Maybe not for you, because in that passage he was used as a slave in Egypt to go through the ranks and even be unjustly accused of rape so that "it may bring about many people and keeping them alive in that famine as they are today." Joseph knew that all of that horrible stuff that happened in his life was working out a plan for other people's good.

Because we're going to care about all the details of the Last Supper and the betrayal, I just want to focus on one last word in verse 3. "Then Satan entered into Judas." I don't want to overplay this so you see a demon behind every bush, but I am saying Satan is the active player in a lot, if not, in one sense, you can trace all of the evil back to him. And if you go to the end of your Bible it's very clear, as a matter of fact, the English Standard Version translators, just like every translation, try to put some headings so that kind of breaks up the text, and the heading over that last paragraph there in Revelation 20 says something like this in your Bible. The English Standard Version says it just



like this: "The Final Defeat of Satan." Now, that's good news. He's active here in the first century and, guess what, he's very active in the 21st century. He is the tempter, he's the accuser of the brethren and he's the opponent. All of that is true. He's the adversary. But one day he will be done. The final defeat of Satan is coming. And though he's a prominent evil player in all of this, I want to tell you, the medicine cabinet, though I'm saying the medicine is for our good, in the end it's going to work together for good, but I am saying there'll be no more bitter pills at one point. There will be a padlock on the medicine cabinet because no longer will there be any compounds of evil in our universe. It just won't happen.

Number three, you need to "Joyfully Anticipate the Final End of Evil." I'm just trying that in this passage to Satan who is the tempter. And it says in that passage as final as one could say it. It says this, "He will be there consigned to the lake of fire where he will be tormented day and night forever and ever." There's finality to that. And there's so much that God hates about that in terms of its effect on the world that he's going to take the world and wipe it away and give us a new world. And he going to take even heaven where Satan's footprints, so to speak, have trafficked in his presence and he'll take heaven and he's going to wipe that out and create a new heaven and a new earth. He's going to start over. That's what comes in the next chapter, Chapter 21 of Revelation. Once we get Satan forever consigned and he's done, there's no temptation anymore. There no accusation anymore.

I hate the bitter medicine even though God intends it for good. But one day there'll be no illness, there'll be no problem, there'll be a systemic cure throughout this whole universe, including my heart, my life and there'll be no roaring lions seeking to devour anyone. There'll be no sickness, no disease, no crying, no pain, no death. That's not a pie-in-the-sky reality. It was all proved historically through the physical bodily resurrection of Christ. It has been accepted as a payment before God and one day, as the clock runs down, and Satan furiously goes about causing a lot of damage, none of it is outside the purview of God's magnificent good plan for every Christian, but in the end, we want to have to put up with it anymore.

As a matter of fact, I started with that concept of Genesis 3 being where this began a problem that God chose to fix through redemption. And I love that picture there that's given us in Genesis 3 of the enemy's head being crushed. Jot this one down. This is a good tweetable passage for you, Romans Chapter 16 verse 20. Paul is talking to a bunch of Christians who were definitely having persecution. Satan was active in Rome, was he not, and he was ramping up a kind of persecution and Nero and eventually Damocles. It was going to be a horrible time for Christians in Rome. And here's Paul's promise by the God-breathed words of the Spirit. "The God of peace," it says, "will soon crush Satan under your feet." There's a sense of finality there. And he says, "The grace," the favor "of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you." We need the favor of Christ and we have it. If you're Christian, we have it. You are loved and "are called according to his purpose." And one day the alternate reality is soon, "his head will be crushed."

I've admitted to you before I'm not a big sports guy. I fake it every now and then for an illustration's purpose. But I grew up with a brother who was way into all of that. And I remember, you know, having to watch every big game, basketball, baseball, football, all of that in our little den in Long Beach. Then somehow my kids got the gene so they got into it when they were growing up and, I mean, they knew all the stuff. And I realized that, you know, I'd walk in and they'd be watching after they did their homework, we were watching ESPN, or watching all this, and I realized that they try to group them all together, all the sports channels, and in that little lineup there is the classic sports channel that just plays all the stuff that I used to watch in the bean bag chair as a kid. Right? All these great games. And I remember having watched some of these and some of them I'm



familiar with, I remember that they were big, my brother was screaming, it was a big deal. And now my kids are watching them for the first time. I've walked in a couple of times and go, "Whoa. I remember that game."

Now my kids don't know what happened there. Right? They get into it like it's playing out right now. They start yelling at the TV the way my brother used to yell at the TV, especially if they're rooting for one particular team. But you know, they could go, really, out there and find out everything they wanted to know about that game because it's already happened. It happened 30 years ago. And here I can say this. If they have stress about their team winning, they don't need to be stressed because all they need to do is look up what happens, and you can find out what happened. Sometimes I walk in and I know what's going to happen. I know this guy gets injured but he's going to pitch and it's going to work out. I understand it.

If you have stress in your life because you've got cancer, you've got a problem, you get a financial collapse, you got relational issues, I'm just telling you this: the extent of your stress, and I'm not saying we're not calling it bad. I'm not going to high five you if you tell me you got a bad problem in your life. I want to say, "Oh that's bad." I'm going to empathize with you, but I am going to tell you this: the extent of your stress in your life over those things really gives me some sense of how well you've studied what really is going to happen in the end. God has promised you. You've got to have the faith to believe the fact and he's proved it in the past and he proved it with the portrayal of Christ. He has said to you, he's going to work these things out for good. And one day all of this is going to be over and you win. We win.

1815, a long time ago, John Newton, remember that from Amazing Grace, the author wrote a song you may not know called Begone Unbelief. Now I know you know the words of Amazing Grace, but listen to this one, see if it doesn't fit. "Begone unbelief," and that's the key, that's the challenge, "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," of the boat, "I'll smile at the storm." They'll think you're crazy, but you can. "Though dark be my way; Since he is my guide, 'tis mind to obey, and 'tis his to provide; Though cisterns be broken, and creatures all 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 is food; Though painful at present, 'twill cease before long, and then, oh, how pleasant the conqueror's song."

300 years before that, Martin Luther wrote a hymn that you know and he spoke of the fact that in this world we've got problems. "Though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us." He reminded us that, "we will not fear, for God hath willed his truth to triumph through us: The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him;" That's my pastoral prayer for you. "His rage we can endure," Why? "For lo! his doom is sure, one little word shall fell him," like a tree. Cut him down. Bam! One little word. Later it was asked of Luther what little word did you have in mind and he said it's the word "liar." That God will look at him in the final verdict and say you're a liar and consign him to punishment. But as it says in the next verse, we know it's not even just the word. He didn't give us the word to contemplate, he gave us the power of that word.

He says, "That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth; The Spirit and the gifts are ours through him who with us sideth; let goods and kindred go." I mean, if that's what Satan wants to take and persecute us, great. "This mortal life," we're going to be a martyr in the this mortal life, "also the body they may kill: but God's truth abideth still," because, and we know this, "his kingdom is forever."



Christian, don't be discouraged just because your life hurts right now. Recognize that God is sovereign as odd as that is. You may have to say, "how unsearchable are his ways, how inscrutable his judgment." You may have that kind of mind-bending struggle with it. How can this be good? Give it time. You need to see with faith and trust in God that he's going to result all things for good, not just in your life, but in human history.

Let's pray together. God, this is a hard time for us to be Christians and to affirm the goodness of your plan, especially because it feels a lot like the days of Noah or the days of Lot in Sodom and Gomorrah. Sometimes, as the Old Testament said we should do, we groan at the sin in our world, we groan at the sin in our lives. We've groan at our failures in the past. We ache over the pains in our lives. We hate Satan's work in our midst, in our home and our lives and our bodies, in this world and yet let us affirm above all of that, though evil is always evil and sin is always sin, that you work all things together for good, as strange as that may be, just like Judas - bad guy, Satan - terrible, betrayal - the chief priests, the scribes, the crucifixion, all of those are bad things, but they are all a part of your good plan.

Let us be much more hopeful in the midst of our trials. Let us be much more faith-filled in trusting you that you love us and you're working all things out for good. And even in that passage in Romans 8 you've promised "nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus." Let us know that it's not persecution, not nakedness, not peril, not sword, there's nothing that should make us doubt your love or your kindness toward us, or more importantly this morning, your good plan that will be carried out. Maybe not for our specific and immediate benefit but for the benefit of something and somewhere for the good of something in your kingdom plan. Let us have more faith and confidence to believe that as we see it played out in the past and we see it in the pages of Scripture. Encourage our hearts this morning, I pray.

In Jesus name, Amen.